



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 1, 2019

Mr. Marc J. Schnall
Counsel for the City of Castle Hill
Langley & Banack, Inc.
Trinity Plaza II
745 East Mulberry Avenue, Suite 700
San Antonio, Texas 78212

OR2019-05811

Dear Mr. Schnall:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 752662.

The City of Castle Hill (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for fees related to specified councilmembers communications with city attorneys. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You explain, and we agree, the information you marked is not responsive to the instant request for information because it does not relate to the specified councilmembers. This ruling does not address the public availability of non-responsive information, and the city is not required to release non-responsive information in response to this request.

As you acknowledge, the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

...

(16) information that is in a bill for attorney's fees and that is not privileged under the attorney-client privilege[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(16). The submitted information consists of attorney fee bills subject to section 552.022(a)(16). Thus, the submitted information must be released unless it is made confidential under the Act or other law. *See id.* Although you raise section 552.107 of the Government Code for some of the information at issue, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under section 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions).* Therefore, none of the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.107. The Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Evidence are "other law" within the meaning of section 552.022. *See In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Accordingly, we will address your argument under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence for the submitted fee bills.

Texas Rule of Evidence 503(b)(1) provides the following:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

(A) between the client or the client's representative and the client's lawyer or the lawyer's representative;

(B) between the client's lawyer and the lawyer's representative;

(C) by the client, the client's representative, the client's lawyer, or the lawyer's representative to a lawyer representing another party in a pending action or that lawyer's representative, if the communications concern a matter of common interest in the pending action;

(D) between the client's representatives or between the client and the client's representative; or

(E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

Tex. R. Evid. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if it is not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* ORD 676 at 6-7. Thus, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must (1) show the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show the communication is confidential by explaining it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *Id.* Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is privileged and confidential under rule 503, provided the client has not waived the privilege or the document does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege extends to entire communication, including factual information).

You state the information you marked consists of communications involving attorneys for the city and city councilmembers. You state the communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the city and these communications have remained confidential. Upon review, we find the city has established most of the information at issue constitutes privileged attorney-client communications under rule 503. Thus, with the exception of the information we have marked for release, the city may withhold the information you marked under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. However, some of the communications at issue are with individuals the city has not demonstrated are privileged parties. Further, some of the information at issue does not document a communication. Thus, we find the city has not demonstrated the remaining information at issue constitutes privileged attorney-client communications for the purposes of Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Accordingly, the city may not withhold the remaining information at issue on that basis. The city must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Kelly McWethy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KSM/gw

Ref: ID# 752662

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)