



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

This ruling has been modified by court action.
The ruling and judgment can be viewed in PDF
format below.



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March 13, 2019

Mr. Michael Shaunessy
Counsel for the City of Hutto
McGinnis Lochridge
600 Congress Avenue, Suite 2100
Austin, Texas 78701

The ruling you have requested has been amended as a result of litigation and has been attached to this document.

OR2019-06956

Dear Mr. Shaunessy:

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# 754679 (ORR# R000373).

The City of Hutto (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for text messages to or from a named city official during a specified time period. The city claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.104, 552.105, 552.107, 552.109, 552.111, and 552.117 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions the city claims and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

Initially, the city argues the requestor's request for public information was withdrawn by operation of law because the requestor failed to timely respond to a cost estimate for

¹The city also claims section 552.305 of the Government Code for the submitted information. However, section 552.305 is not an exception to disclosure; instead, it permits a governmental body to decline to release information for the purpose of requesting an attorney general decision if it believes another's privacy or property interests may be involved. Gov't Code § 552.305(a); Open Records Decision No. 542 at 1-3 (1990) (discussing statutory predecessor).

²We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

providing requested records. Thus, the city seeks to withdraw its request for an open records decision. Upon review of a copy of the cost estimate, we find it does not comply with the requirements of section 552.2615 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.2615(a). Accordingly, we conclude the requestor's public information request has not been withdrawn by operation of law, and the city may not withdraw its request for a ruling on that basis. Accordingly, we will consider the city's arguments against disclosure of the requested information.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee or official of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). The city informs us, and provides documentation demonstrating, the named city official made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Therefore, the city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. However, the city has not demonstrated the applicability of section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code to any portion of the remaining information and the city may not withhold any of the remaining information on that basis.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy, which protects information that is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). To demonstrate the applicability of common-law privacy, both prongs of this test must be satisfied. *Id.* at 681-82. Types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court are delineated in *Industrial Foundation*. *Id.* at 683. Upon review, we find the city has not demonstrated any of the remaining information at issue is highly intimate or embarrassing and not of legitimate public concern. Thus, the city may not withhold any portion of the remaining information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses the doctrine of constitutional privacy. Constitutional privacy consists of two interrelated types of privacy: (1) the right to make certain kinds of decisions independently and (2) an individual's interest in avoiding disclosure of personal matters. Open Records Decision No. 455 at 4 (1987). The first type protects an individual's autonomy within "zones of privacy" which include matters related to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, and child rearing and education.

Id. The second type of constitutional privacy requires a balancing between the individual's privacy interests and the public's need to know information of public concern. *Id.* The scope of information protected is narrower than that under the common law doctrine of privacy; the information must concern the "most intimate aspects of human affairs." *Id.* at 5 (quoting *Ramie v. City of Hedwig Village, Texas*, 765 F.2d 490 (5th Cir. 1985)). After review of the remaining information at issue, we find the city has not demonstrated any portion of the remaining information falls within the zones of privacy or implicates an individual's privacy interests for purposes of constitutional privacy. Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.101 on the basis of constitutional privacy.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). The "test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage." *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831 (Tex. 2015). The city contends some of the remaining information relates to discussions about city projects. However, the city has not demonstrated any portion of the information relates to a specific competitive bidding situation. Upon review, we find the city has failed to establish release of any of the remaining information would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.105 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to "appraisals or purchase price of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to the formal award of contracts for the property." Gov't Code § 552.105(2). Section 552.105 is designed to protect a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with respect to particular transactions. Open Records Decision Nos. 564 at 2 (1990), 357 (1982), 310 (1982). Information that is excepted from disclosure under section 552.105 that pertains to such negotiations may be excepted from disclosure so long as the transaction relating to that information is not complete. *See* ORD 310. But the protection offered by section 552.105 is not limited solely to transactions not yet finalized. This office has concluded that information about specific parcels of land obtained in advance of other parcels to be acquired for the same project could be withheld where release of the information would harm the governmental body's negotiating position with respect to the remaining parcels. *See* ORD 564 at 2. A governmental body may withhold information "which, if released, would impair or tend to impair [its] 'planning and negotiating position in regard to particular transactions.'" ORD 357 at 3 (quoting Open Records Decision No. 222 (1979)). The question of whether specific information, if publicly released, would impair a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with regard to particular transactions is a question of fact. Accordingly, this office will accept a governmental body's good-faith determination in this regard, unless the contrary is clearly shown as a matter of law. *See* ORD 564.

The city argues some of the remaining information identifies property to be used for a public purpose or information pertaining to the city's planning and negotiation position with respect to property transactions. Upon review, however, we conclude the city has failed to demonstrate the applicability of section 552.105 of the Government Code to any portion of the remaining information and the city may not withhold any of the remaining information on that basis.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov't Code § 552.107(1). 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. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in a capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a *confidential* communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was "not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit the communication." *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

The city claims some of the remaining information consists of communications involving attorneys for the city and city officials and employees in their capacities as clients. However, upon review, we find the city has failed to establish any of the remaining information at issue constitutes communications between or among employees and attorneys for the city for the

purposes of section 552.107(1). Thus, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue on that basis.

Section 552.109 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[p]rivate correspondence or communications of an elected office holder relating to matters the disclosure of which would constitute an invasion of privacy[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.109. This office has held the test to be applied to information under section 552.109 is the same as the common-law privacy standard under section 552.101, as discussed above. *Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 682. Upon review, we find the city has failed to demonstrate any of the remaining information constitutes highly intimate or embarrassing information that is of no legitimate concern to the public. Therefore, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.109 of the Government Code.

Next, the city claims some of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Section 552.111 excepts from disclosure “[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.111. Section 552.111 encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines work product as

- (1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or
- (2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party’s representatives or among a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5. A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party’s representative. TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied

- a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

Nat'l Tank Co. v. Brotherton, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A “substantial chance” of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather “that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear.” *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7.

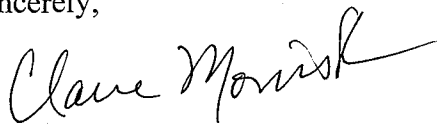
The city generally claims the remaining information contains attorney work product. However, the city does not state, and we are unable to determine, any portion of the information at issue was created for trial or in anticipation for litigation. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under the work product privilege of section 552.111 of the Government Code.

In summary, the city must withhold the information we marked under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. 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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/eb

Ref: ID# 754679

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Velva L. Price
District Clerk
Travis County
D-1-GN-19-002006
Alexus Rodriguez

CAUSE NO. D-1-GN-19-002006

CITY OF HUTTO, TEXAS,

Plaintiff,

V.

KEN PAXTON ATTORNEY
GENERAL OF TEXAS,

Defendant.

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THE DISTRICT COURT OF

TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

53RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT

NOTICE OF NONSUIT WITH PREJUDICE

TO THE HONORABLE JUDGE OF SAID COURT:

Plaintiff City of Hutto, Texas (“Plaintiff”), advises this Court that it is nonsuiting its claims against Defendant Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, in this matter, with prejudice, based on the fact that Plaintiff has produced all of the responsive documents pursuant to the underlying Attorney General’s Opinion in this matter.

WHEREFORE, PREMISES CONSIDERED, Plaintiff nonsuits all of its claims against Defendant in this matter with prejudice.

Respectfully submitted,
Bojorquez Law Firm, PC



Erin Higginbotham
State Bar No. 24065418
erin@texasmunicipallawyers.com
Bojorquez Law Firm
11675 Jollyville Rd. Ste. 300
Austin, Texas 78759
Work: (512) 250-0411
Fax: (512) 250-0749

ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF
CITY OF HUTTO

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing document has been served upon all known counsel of record pursuant to the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure on this 29th day of July, 2020.

Cole Hutchison
Administrative Law Division
Office of the Attorney General of Texas
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711
Cole.hutchison@oag.texas.gov



Erin Higginbotham