



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

March 19, 2019

Ms. Yesica Antu-sanchez
Records Management Officer
Bexar Appraisal District
P. O. Box 830248
San Antonio, Texas 78283-0248

OR2019-07587

Dear Ms. Antu-Sanchez:

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# 755221 (WO # 19-12031).

The Bexar Appraisal District (the "district") received a request for information pertaining to twenty-seven property identifications numbers. You state you are releasing some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.149 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, you indicate some of the submitted information, which you have marked, is not responsive to the present request. This ruling does not address the public availability of the non-responsive information, and the district need not release it in response to this request.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't

¹We assume that 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 that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 22.27 of the Tax Code, which states in pertinent part:

(a) Rendition statements, real and personal property reports, attachments to those statements and reports, and other information the owner of property provides to the appraisal office in connection with the appraisal of the property, including income and expense information related to a property filed with an appraisal office and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office or the comptroller about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential, are confidential and not open to public inspection. The statements and reports and the information they contain about specific real or personal property or a specific real or personal property owner and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential may not be disclosed to anyone other than an employee of the appraisal office who appraises property except as authorized by Subsection (b) of this section.

Tax Code § 22.27(a). The district argues the information it marked is confidential under section 22.27(a). You state the district is an appraisal office for purposes of section 22.27. You state the information at issue “consists of documents generated using information obtained from property owners under a promise of confidentiality.” You do not indicate any of the exceptions in section 22.27(b) apply in this instance. *See id.* § 22.27(b). However, you do not inform us which portions of the information at issue were provided by property owners. Thus, we must rule conditionally. To the extent any of the information the district marked was provided by property owners in connection with an appraisal, the district must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 22.27 of the Tax Code. However, to the extent any of the information at issue was not provided by property owners in connection with an appraisal, the information is not confidential under section 22.27(a) of the Tax Code and the district may not withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis.

The district also claims section 552.149 of the Government Code for any remaining information it marked. Section 552.149 provides, in relevant part:

(a) Information relating to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information received from a private entity by the comptroller or the chief appraiser of an appraisal district under Chapter 6, Tax Code, is excepted from the requirements of [the Act].

(b) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), the property owner or the owner’s agent may, on request, obtain from the chief appraiser of the applicable appraisal district a copy of each item of information described by Section 41.461(a)(2),

Tax Code, and a copy of each item of information that the chief appraiser took into consideration but does not plan to introduce at the hearing on the protest. In addition, the property owner or agent may, on request, obtain from the chief appraiser comparable sales data from a reasonable number of sales that is relevant to any matter to be determined by the appraisal review board at the hearing on the property owner's protest[.]

Gov't Code § 552.149(a)-(b). Subsections 552.149(a) and (b) are limited to those counties having a population of 50,000 or more. *Id.* § 552.149(e). We note Bexar County has a population of 50,000 or more. You state any remaining information at issue "includes documents containing information relating to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information received from a private entity." Therefore, we find to the extent any remaining information at issue relates to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information that was provided to the district by private entities, it must be withheld under section 552.149(a) of the Government Code. Conversely, to the extent the remaining information does not relate to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information or was not provided to the district by private entities, it is not confidential under section 552.149(a) and it may not be withheld on that basis.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Id. § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, orig. proceeding); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd

n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

The district states, and provides documentation showing, multiple lawsuits were pending against the district when the district received the request for information. You state the information the district marked is related to the pending lawsuits. Based on your representations, the submitted documentation, and our review of the information at issue, we find litigation was pending when the district received this request for information, and the information at issue is related to the pending litigation for the purposes of section 552.103.

We note, however, the opposing parties have seen or had access to some of the information at issue. The purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties seeking information relating to that litigation to obtain it through discovery procedures. *See* ORD 551 at 4-5. Thus, once the opposing party has seen or had access to information relating to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, there is no interest in withholding such information from public disclosure under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Upon review, we find some of the information, which we have marked, has been seen by the opposing parties and may not be withheld under section 552.103(a). Therefore, with the exception of the information we marked, which must be released, the district may withhold the information it marked under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Further, we note the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

In summary, to the extent any of the information the district marked was provided by property owners in connection with an appraisal, the district must withhold such information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 22.27 of the Tax Code. To the extent any remaining marked information relates to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information that was provided to the district by private entities, the district must withhold such information under section 552.149(a) of the Government Code. With the exception of the information we marked, which must be released, the district may withhold the information it has marked under section 552.103 of the Government Code. The district 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Groff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Erin" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Groff".

Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/jxd

Ref: ID# 755221

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)