



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 1, 2019

Ms. Ann-Marie Sheely
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2019-21268

Dear Ms. Sheely:

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# 778443.

The Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources (the "county") received a request for information regarding a specified property and roadwork plans. You state the county will release some information. You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code 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. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined

section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.


You assert the information at issue consists of advice, recommendations, and opinions of the county's staff regarding policymaking decisions. You also inform us the information consists of a draft document that reflects the deliberations of the county's staff. However, you do not explain whether the draft document was intended to be released in its final form. Thus, with respect to this information, we must rule conditionally. To the extent the draft document at issue will be released to the public in its final form, the county may withhold the information you marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. To the extent the draft document will not be released to the public in its final form, the county may not withhold the marked information under section 552.111. Nevertheless, in that instance, we find portions of the information at issue consist of advice, opinions, or recommendations on the policymaking matters of the county. Accordingly, with respect to the draft document that will not be released to the public in its final form, the county may withhold the information we marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We find the remaining information at issue is general administrative and purely factual information or does not

pertain to policymaking. Thus, we find you have failed to demonstrate the remaining information consists of internal communications containing advice, opinions, or recommendations on policymaking matters of the county. Therefore, to the extent the county will not release the remainder of the draft document to the public in its final form, the county may not withhold any portion of the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code on the basis of deliberative process privilege. In that instance, the county 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/be

Ref: ID# 778443

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)