



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 22, 2020

Mr. Robert Carroll
Senior Assistant City Attorney
City of Odessa
P.O. Box 4398
Odessa, Texas 79760-4398

OR2020-01944

Dear Mr. Carroll:

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# 807389 (ORR# P001410).

The City of Odessa (the "city") received a request for a specified incident report. The city claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the procedural obligations of the city under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Although the city informs us it received the request for information on October 10, 2020, we note the copy of the request that the city submitted shows it received the request on October 9, 2020. Thus, the city's ten-business-day deadline to request a ruling was October 23, 2020. However, the envelope containing the request for a ruling from this office contains two postmarks: the first dated October 24, 2020, and the second dated October 31, 2020. *See* Gov't Code § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail). Therefore, the city failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is a

compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). Because sections 552.101, 552.130, 552.136, and 552.137 of the Government Code can provide compelling reasons to overcome the presumption of openness, we will address the applicability of these sections to the information at issue.¹ However, we find the city has failed to establish a compelling reason to address its remaining exception.

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 the *Industrial Foundation* decision. *Id.* at 683. Additionally, this office has found personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992), 545 (1990). The Third Court of Appeals has concluded public citizens’ dates of birth are protected by common-law privacy pursuant to section 552.101. *See Paxton v. City of Dallas*, No. 03-13-00546-CV, 2015 WL 3394061, at *3 (Tex. App.—Austin May 22, 2015, pet. denied) (mem. op.). The city must withhold all public citizens’ dates of birth under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We also find some of the remaining information, which we have marked, satisfies the standard articulated by the Texas Supreme Court in the *Industrial Foundation* decision. Accordingly, the city must also withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides information relating to a motor vehicle operator’s license, driver’s license, motor vehicle title or registration, or personal identification document issued by an agency of this state or another state or country is excepted from public release. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.130. The city must withhold the motor vehicle record information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.” *Id.* § 552.136(b). This office has determined an insurance policy number is an access device number for purposes of section 552.136. Open Records Decision No. 684 at 9 (2009).

¹ The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

Thus, the city must withhold the submitted insurance policy number under section 552.136 of the Government Code.


Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail addresses at issue do not appear to be of a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). The city does not inform us a member of the public has affirmatively consented to the release of any e-mail address contained in the submitted materials. Therefore, the city must withhold the submitted e-mail addresses of members of the public in the remaining information under section 552.137 of the Government Code.

In summary, the city must withhold the following: (1) all public citizens’ dates of birth and the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy; (2) the information we have marked under section 552.130 of the Government Code; (3) the submitted insurance policy number under section 552.136 of the Government Code; and (3) the submitted e-mail addresses of members of the public in the remaining information under section 552.137 of the Government Code. The city must release the remaining information.²

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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,


James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/be

² We note the information at issue contains social security numbers. Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person’s social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Gov’t Code § 552.147(b).

Mr. Robert Carroll - Page 4

Ref: ID# 807389

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)