



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 4, 2020

Mr. Tyrone Lin
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
Legal Department
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2020-15335

Dear Mr. Lin:

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# 831697 (GC No. 26587).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for information related to a specified janitorial contract, including the bid tabulation sheet, winning proposal, current contract, and winning bidder information. You state the city will release some information. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of ABM Aviation, Inc. ("ABM").¹ Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified ABM of the request for information and of the right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from ABM explaining why the submitted information should not be

¹ We note the city did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Nevertheless, the interests of a third party can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude ABM has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See, e.g., id.* § 552.110 (requiring the provision of specific factual evidence demonstrating the applicability of the exception). Accordingly, the city may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest ABM may have in the information.

We note some of the materials at issue may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; *see* Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. Accordingly, the city must release the submitted information; however, any information that is subject to copyright may be released only in accordance with copyright law.

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,

Deborah Southerland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DS/rm

Ref: ID# 831697

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)