



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 29, 2020

Mr. Christopher Gregg
Counsel for the City of Webster
Gregg & Gregg, P.C.
16055 Space Center Boulevard, Suite 150
Houston, Texas 77062

OR2020-16685

Dear Mr. Gregg:

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# 831796 (Ref. No. CH-72-2020).

The City of Webster (the “city”), which you represent, received a request for building plans pertaining to a specified construction project. You claim some of the submitted information is protected under copyright law. Additionally, you state release of the information at issue may implicate the proprietary interests of the following third parties: BELCO Electrical Engineering; Boundary One, LLC; Charles E. Ruykhaver; Daniel Scott Engineering, LLC; McBride Plumbing, LLC; Nexgen Engineers, LLC; and PAR Church Builder, Inc. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation demonstrating, the city notified these interested third parties of the request for information and of their 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 considered your argument and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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

¹ We 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.

from any of the interested third parties explaining why the information at issue should not be released. Thus, we have no basis to conclude any of the third parties have a protected proprietary interest in the information at issue. *See id.* § 552.110. Therefore, the city may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest the third parties may have in it.

You assert, and we agree, some of the submitted information appears to 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 subject to copyright may only be released 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,

Blake Brennan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BBX/be

Ref: ID# 831796

c: Requestor

c: 7 Third Parties