



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 22, 2022

Ms. Bridgette A. Begle
Counsel for the City of Hempstead
Olson & Olson, L.L.P.
2727 Allen Parkway, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77019-2133

OR2022-21529

Dear Ms. Begle:

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# 961500 (Reference Nos. COH22-016 and COH22-017).

The City of Hempstead (the "city"), which you represent, received two requests from different requestors for information pertaining to a specified address during defined periods of time. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.1331 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.1331 of the Government Code provides, in part:

(a) In this section:

¹ We note, and you acknowledge, the city failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting a decision from this office with respect to the first request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Nonetheless, section 552.1331 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness caused by a failure to comply with section 552.301. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352. Thus, we will consider the applicability of this exception to the submitted information, notwithstanding the city's violation of section 552.301 in requesting this decision.

(1) “Advanced metering system” means a utility metering system that collects data at regular intervals through the use of an automated wireless or radio network.

(2) “Government-operated utility” has the meaning assigned by Section 182.051, Utilities Code.

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (c) of this section and Section 182.052, Utilities Code, information maintained by a government-operated utility is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if it is information that:

(1) is collected as part of an advanced metering system for usage, services, and billing, including amounts billed or collected for utility usage; or

(2) reveals whether:

(A) an account is delinquent or eligible for disconnection; or

(B) services have been discontinued by the government-operated utility.

(c) A government-operated utility must disclose information described by Subsection (b)(1) to a customer of the utility or a representative of the customer if the information directly relates to utility services provided to the customer and is not confidential under law.

Gov’t Code § 552.1331(a)-(c). You state the city is a government-operated utility for purposes of section 552.1331. *See* Util. Code § 182.051(3) (providing a “government-operated utility” is a governmental body or entity that, for compensation, provides water, wastewater, sewer, gas, garbage, electricity, or drainage service). You contend the submitted information is protected under section 552.1331(b)(1) of the Government Code. However, upon review, we find the city has failed to demonstrate the information at issue was collected as part of an advanced metering system. Therefore, the city may not withhold any portion of the submitted information under section 552.1331 of the Government Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the city must release the submitted 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 <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,

Kimbell Kesling
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KK/jxd

Ref: ID# 961500

Enc. Submitted documents

c: 2 Requestors
(w/o enclosures)