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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 1, 2022

Ms. Patricia M. Borschow
Assistant General Counsel
El Paso Water Utilities – Public Service Board
P.O. Box 511
El Paso, Texas 79961-0511

OR2022-37140

Dear Ms. Borschow:

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# 987570 (Internal File# EP09-06).

The El Paso Water Utilities – Public Service Board (the “board”) received a request for information related to a specified project. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests Tao Industries d/b/a Hawk Construction (“Hawk”). Accordingly, you state you notified Hawk of the request for information and of its 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 received comments from Hawk. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Hawk raises section 552.104 of the Government Code for the submitted information. Section 552.104 excepts from disclosure information “if a governmental body demonstrates that release of the information would harm its interests by providing an advantage to a competitor or bidder in a particular ongoing competitive situation or in a particular competitive situation where the governmental body establishes the situation at issue is set to reoccur or there is a specific and demonstrable intent to enter into the

competitive situation again in the future.” Gov’t Code § 552.104(a) (emphasis added). In *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831 (Tex. 2015), the Texas Supreme Court held section 552.104 does not preclude third parties from raising section 552.104 as an exception to disclosure. *See Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 842. However, the Eighty-sixth Legislature has amended section 552.104 since the issuance of *Boeing*. *See* Act of May 25, 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., S.B. 943, § 3. Section 552.104 now expressly limits the protections of section 552.104 to governmental bodies. Gov’t Code § 552.104(a). Therefore, we do not address Hawk’s arguments under section 552.104 of the Government Code.

Section 552.110(b) of the Government Code states “information is [excepted from required disclosure] if it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that the information is a trade secret.” *See id.* § 552.110(b). Section 552.110(a) defines a trade secret as all forms and types of information if:

- (1) the owner of the trade secret has taken reasonable measures under the circumstances to keep the information secret; and
- (2) the information derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable through proper means by, another person who can obtain economic value from the disclosure or use of the information.

Id. § 552.110(a). Section 552.110(c) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” *Id.* § 552.110(c). Hawk argues the submitted information consists of trade secrets subject to section 552.110(b) and commercial or financial information subject to section 552.110(c). Upon review, we find Hawk has failed to provide specific factual evidence demonstrating the information at issue is a trade secret or constitutes commercial or financial information, the release of which would result in substantial competitive harm. Therefore, the board may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.110 of the Government Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the board 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,

Tim Neal
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

TN/pt

Ref: ID# 987570

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)