



THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
OF TEXAS

JIM MATTOX
ATTORNEY GENERAL

November 20, 1989

Mr. R. Clayton Hutchins
City Attorney
City of Grand Prairie
P.O. Box 530011
Grand Prairie, Texas 75053-0011

Dear Mr. Hutchins:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Texas Open Records Act, article 6252-17a, V.T.C.S. Your request was assigned ID# 7489; this decision is OR89-386.

Under the Open Records Act, all information held by governmental bodies is open unless the information falls within one of the act's specific exceptions to disclosure. Attorney General Opinion H-436 (1974). The act places on the custodian of records the burden of proving that records are excepted from public disclosure. If a governmental body fails to claim an exception, the exception is ordinarily waived unless the information is deemed confidential under the act. See Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). The act does not require this office to raise and consider exceptions that you have not raised.

The Dallas Morning News (the News) requested the Grand Prairie Police Department's internal investigation files that relate to the United State Department of Justice civil rights investigations involving Grand Prairie police officers. You state that the News has identified the files it seeks only by the corresponding Department of Justice identification numbers and that the city is unable to determine from the written request which files correspond with the provided numbers. You now seek a decision from this office as to whether the request is sufficiently specific for the city to determine what information is being sought and if the city is legally required to obtain information from another governmental body, i.e. the Department of Justice, to determine what is being sought by the requestor.

In Open Records Decision No. 87 (1975), this office held that the Open Records Act imposes an obligation on a governmental body to make a good faith effort to relate open

Mr. R. Clayton Hutchins
November 20, 1989
Page 2

records requests to documents that it holds. See also Open Records Decision No. 58 (1974). One manner of exhibiting this good faith is to advise the requestor of the types of documents available so that he may narrow his request. Id.; see also Open Records Decision No. 304 (1982).

This, however, is not the only manner in which a governmental body may demonstrate good faith. The requestor has provided the city with the name and telephone number of a Department of Justice employee who is authorized to disclose to the city the identity of each police officer under investigation in relation to the identification numbers you now hold. The city can easily obtain this information via correspondence or telephone conversation with the Department of Justice, just as other Texas cities have done in response to similar requests from the News. Once the requested records have been so identified, you will have ten days in which to submit representative samples of the documents with your arguments as to why the information should not be released.

Because case law and prior published open records decisions resolve your request, we are resolving this matter with this informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. If you have questions about this ruling, please refer to OR89-386.

Yours very truly,

Open Government Section
of the Opinion Committee

Open Government Section
of the Opinion Committee
Approved by Jennifer S. Riggs
Chief, Open Government Section

JSR/RWP/le

Ref.: ID# 7489

cc: Ms. Lorraine Adams
Staff Writer
The Dallas Morning News
Communications Center
Dallas, Texas 75265

Mr. Paul C. Walter
Jenkins & Gilchrist
1445 Ross Avenue
Suite 3200
Dallas, Texas 75202-2711