



Office of the Attorney General  
State of Texas

DAN MORALES  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

April 15, 1996

Ms. Tracy B. Calabrese  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR96-0545

Dear Ms. Calabrese:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 39467.

The City of Houston (the "city") received three requests for the names and addresses of persons who filed complaints of deed restriction violations in the Enfield Subdivision. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information protected by the informer's privilege.

The informer's privilege is actually a governmental entity's privilege to withhold from disclosure the identity of those persons who report violations of law. The privilege recognizes the duty of citizens to report violations of law and, by preserving their anonymity, encourages them to perform that duty. *Roviaro v. United States*, 353 U.S. 53, 59 (1957). The informer's privilege protects the identity of a person who reports a violation or possible violation of law to officials charged with the duty of enforcing the particular law. See Open Records Decision Nos. 515 (1988), 191 (1978). This may include enforcement of quasi-criminal civil laws. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 (1988) at 3, 391 (1983) at 3. This office has held that the informer's privilege also applies when the informer reports violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." Open Records Decision No. 515 (1988) at 2 (quoting Open Records Decision No. 279 (1981) at 2). The privilege may protect the informer's identity and any portion of his statement that may tend to reveal his identity. Open Records Decision No. 515 (1988) at 2.

Section 10-553(a) of Houston's Code of Ordinances, as amended by City of Houston Ordinance No. 94-1154, adopted October 26, 1994 (the "Houston Ordinances"), provides that the city attorney is authorized to file or become a party to a lawsuit to enforce a deed restriction. Section 10-552(a) of the Houston Ordinances provides that an

owner who is in violation of a deed restriction "shall be subject to civil penalties of not more than \$1,000.00 per day . . ." In this case the complainants reported violations of the law, a city ordinance, to the city, an agency that is authorized to enforce that ordinance. Accordingly, we conclude that the complainants' names and addresses are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information protected by the informer's privilege. We caution, however, that the city may not withhold a complainant's identity if the individual who would have cause to resent the communication knows the complainant's identity. See Open Records Decision No. 202 (1978) at 2 (quoting *Roviaro v. United States*, 353 U.S. 53, 60 (1957)).

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Karen E. Hattaway  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KEH/ch

Ref.: ID# 39467

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Bruce "Alex" Binkley  
Alex Binkley & Associates  
9525 Katy Frwy., Suite 119  
Houston, Texas 77024  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Jose Calvillo  
J.C.'s Auto Sales  
2205 S/Sgt. Macario Garcia Drive  
Houston, Texas 77011  
(w/o enclosures)