OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

April 18, 2000

Ms. Tenley A. Aldredge
Assistant County Attorney
County of Travis
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2000-1544

Dear Ms. Aldredge:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 134645.

Travis County (the "county") received a request for evaluations of certain proposals submitted to the county in response to Request for Services ("RFS") #S990088TS. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.104 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.104 states that information is excepted from required public disclosure if release of the information would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. The purpose of this exception is to protect the interests of a governmental body usually in competitive bidding situations. *See* Open Records Decision No. 592 (1991). This exception protects information from public disclosure if the governmental body demonstrates potential harm to its interests in a particular competitive situation. *See* Open Records Decision No. 463 (1987). Generally, section 552.104 does not except bids from public disclosure after bidding is completed and the contract has been awarded. *See* Open Records Decision 541 (1990).

In this case, you inform us that the county's purchasing office "has not yet completed the bidding evaluation process for RFS #S990088TS. Rather, the [purchasing office] continues to internally review and evaluate the received proposals and will award the final contract sometime within the next several weeks." After reviewing your arguments and the submitted information, we agree the requested information is excepted from disclosure based on section 552.104 until such time as the contract is awarded. Open Records Decision No. 170 at 2 (1977). Accordingly, you may withhold the requested information based on section 552.104 until such time as the contract is awarded.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.–Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

Kathryn S. Knechtel

Kathryn S. Knechtel
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KSK/ljp

Ref: ID# 134645

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Steven Jackobs
Executive Director
Capital IDEA
P.O. Box 1784
Austin, Texas 78767
(w/o enclosures)