



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

January 23, 2004

Ms. Noelle C. Letteri
Legal Services Division
Texas General Land Office
P.O. Box 12873
Austin, Texas 78711-2873

OR2004-0489

Dear Ms. Letteri:

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# 194949.

The Texas General Land Office (the "land office") received a request for "the audit findings of the Parks Board of Galveston." You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.116 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.116 provides in pertinent part:

(a) An audit working paper of an audit of the state auditor or the auditor of a state agency . . . is excepted from [public disclosure]. If information in an audit working paper is also maintained in another record, that other record is not excepted from [public disclosure] by this section.

(b) In this section:

(1) 'Audit' means an audit authorized or required by a statute of this state or the United States and includes an investigation.

(2) 'Audit working paper' includes all information, documentary or otherwise, prepared or maintained in conducting an audit or preparing an audit report, including:

(A) intra-agency and interagency communications; and

(B) drafts of the audit report or portions of those drafts.

Act of May 28, 2003, 78th Leg., R.S., ch. 379, § 1, 2003 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 1604 (to be codified as amendment to Gov't Code § 552.116). A governmental body that invokes section 552.116 must demonstrate that the audit working papers are from an audit authorized or required by statute by identifying the applicable statute. You inform us that section 25.20 of title 31 of the Texas Administrative Code obliges the land office to conduct audits of participants in the beach maintenance reimbursement fund program, which is authorized under subchapter C, chapter 61 of the Natural Resources Code. You explain that the information at issue is maintained as part of the land office's audit of such a program in which the Park Board of Trustees of the City of Galveston participates. Further, you note that the audit is pending. Based on our review of your representations and the submitted information, we find you have sufficiently demonstrated that the information at issue was prepared or maintained by the land office's auditor in conducting an audit authorized or required by a statute of this state or the United States. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.116(a), (b)(1), (b)(2). Accordingly, the land office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.116 of the Government Code.

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 Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512)475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/jh

Ref: ID# 194949
Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Tom Brown
Ms. Lorraine Brown
c/o Legal Services Division
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(w/o enclosures)