



**ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS**  
**GREG ABBOTT**

December 27, 2005

Ms. Irina Visan  
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.  
1800 Lincoln Plaza  
500 North Akard  
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2005-11587

Dear Ms. Visan:

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# 242130.

The City of Rowlett (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a complaint made against the requestor. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. Subsections 552.301(a) and (b) provide:

(a) A governmental body that receives a written request for information that it wishes to withhold from public disclosure and that it considers to be within one of the [Act's] exceptions . . . must ask for a decision from the attorney general about whether the information is within that exception if there has not been a previous determination about whether the information falls within one of the exceptions.

(b) The governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within a reasonable time but not later than the 10th business day after the date of receiving the written request.

Gov't Code § 552.301(a), (b). You state that the city received the written request for information on November 11, 2005. Based on this date, the tenth business day following the city's receipt of the request was November 29, 2005.<sup>1</sup> However, the city did not request a decision from this office until November 30, 2005. We therefore find that the city failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 in requesting a ruling from this office.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. See Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling interest is demonstrated when some other source of law makes the information at issue confidential or third-party interests are at stake. See Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977).

You claim exception to disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege. Section 552.101, which encompasses "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision," generally can provide a compelling reason to overcome this presumption of openness. See Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). The informer's privilege, however, is held by the governmental body and serves to protect its interests in preserving the flow of information to the governmental body. See *Roviaro v. U.S.*, 353 U.S. 53, 59 (1957). Accordingly, a governmental body is free to waive the informer's privilege and release information for which it otherwise could claim the exception. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 6 (1990). Thus, the informer's privilege does not constitute a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness. We therefore determine that none of the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.101 on the basis of the informer's privilege. The city must release the requested information.

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

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<sup>1</sup>We note that November 24, 2005 and November 25, 2005 were holidays. Otherwise, you do not inform us that the city was closed on any other days during this time period.

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 ten 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).

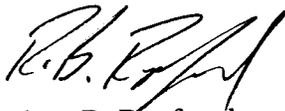
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Kapfogel  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RBR/krl

Ref: ID# 242130

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Phillip Bowen and Mrs. Gloria Bowen  
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Rowlett, Texas 75088  
(w/o enclosures)