



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 28, 2006

Ms. Bonnie Lee Goldstein
Bonnie Lee Goldstein, P.C.
P.O. Box 140940
Dallas, Texas 75214-0940

OR2006-03051

Dear Ms. Goldstein:

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# 245241.

The City of Italy (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for a "copy of the auditor's report." You inform us that you were aware that the requestor was seeking the results of the Water Department Investigative Audit. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides that "a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body" may not be withheld from the public unless the information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of a completed audit report made for the city, which is made expressly public by section 552.022 and must be released, unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 or confidential under other law. Sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code are discretionary exceptions under the Act that do not constitute "other law" for purposes of section 552.022. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 473 (1987) (governmental body may waive section 552.103), 677 at 10 (2002) (attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 may be waived), 676 at 10-11 (2002) (section 552.107 is not other law for purposes of section 552.022), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000)

(discretionary exceptions generally). As such, sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 are not other laws that make information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. Therefore, the city may not withhold the submitted information under these claimed exceptions to disclosure.

We note, however, that the attorney-client privilege is also found in rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The Texas Supreme Court has held that “[t]he Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and Texas Rules of Evidence are ‘other law’ within the meaning of section 552.022.” See *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Rule 503 of the Texas Rule of Evidence encompasses the attorney-client privilege and provides:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

(A) between the client or a representative of the client and the client’s lawyer or a representative of the lawyer;

(B) between the lawyer and the lawyer’s representative;

(C) by the client or a representative of the client, or the client’s lawyer or a representative of the lawyer, to a lawyer or a representative of a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein;

(D) between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client; or

(E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is “confidential” if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must: (1) show that the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; (2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and (3) show that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. See Open Records Decision No. 676 (2002). Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire

communication is confidential under Rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in Rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 4527 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, no pet.) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

The city explains the information was created at the request of the City Attorney to provide legal advice to the City Council. You further assert that the submitted information consists of communications between the City Attorney, the City Council, and the consultant representatives performing under the direction of the City Attorney and the City Council. You further state that the submitted documents were created in furtherance of the rendition of legal services. The city further explains the submitted documents were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we agree that the submitted documents constitute privileged attorney-client communications that may be withheld based on rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

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, 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 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Jaime L. Flores
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLF/er

Ref: ID# 245241

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Peter K. Rusek
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(w/o enclosures)