



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 9, 2006

Mr. Pete Eckert
Wolfe, Tidwell, & McCoy, L.L.P.
123 North. Crockett Street, Suite 100
Sherman, Texas 75090

OR2006-06089

Dear Mr. Eckert:

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# 251732.

The City of Rockwall (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information for various categories of information pertaining to complaints regarding five specified addresses during a certain period of time and information regarding correspondence mailed to the requestor from the city. You claim that portions of the requested information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered comments from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Initially, we note that you have not submitted any information regarding the mailed correspondence for our review. Therefore, to the extent any additional information existed on the date the district received this request, we assume it has been released. If you have not released any such records, you must release them to the requestor at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 654 (2000) (noting that if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible under circumstances).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. The

Texas courts have recognized the informer's privilege. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969). It protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report 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. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, Evidence, § 2374, at 767 (McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988). The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect that informer's identity. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You state that the submitted complaints pertain to a violation of the city's Property Maintenance Code. However, you have not explained whether the alleged violation carries civil or criminal penalties. Accordingly, the city has not demonstrated that the informer's privilege is applicable to the information at issue. Thus, we conclude that you may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege. As you claim no other exceptions to disclosure, the submitted information must be released to the requestor.

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,



Candice M. De La Garza
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CMD/lrg

Ref: ID# 251732

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Gary Kehrer
605 Stonebridge Circle
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(w/o enclosures)