ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 27, 2006

Ms. Wendy E. Ogden
Assistant City Attorney
City of Corpus Christi
P.O. Box 9277
Corpus Christi, Texas 78469-9277

OR2006-06806

Dear Ms. Ogden:

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# 253598.

The City of Corpus Christi (the "city") received a request for "pre-submittal notes, building permit and inspection information, other written building code-related communications, and all the plans and specifications that the City has" for specified building types. You state that release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Ferrell Brown & Associates, Inc. ("Brown") and Ben Boettcher & Associates, Architects, Inc. ("Boettcher"). Accordingly, you inform us, and provide documentation showing, that you notified Brown and Boettcher of the request and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information at issue should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d) (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure in certain circumstances). We have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.305 of the Government Code allows an interested third party ten business days from the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code

§ 552.305(d)(2)(B). However, as of the date of this letter, we have not received arguments from Brown or Boettcher for withholding any of the submitted information. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that the release of this information would harm the proprietary interests of these third parties. *See id.* § 551.110(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (stating that business enterprise that claims exception for commercial or financial information under section 552.110(b) must show by specific factual evidence that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret). Accordingly, we conclude that the city may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest that Brown or Boettcher may have in it.

We note, however, that the submitted information includes e-mail addresses. Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body" unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail addresses we have marked do not appear to be of a type specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). Therefore, the city must withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137.

Finally, we note that some of the submitted information may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

In summary, the city must withhold the e-mail addresses we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released to the requestor. However, any information protected by copyright must only be released in accordance with applicable copyright laws.

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).

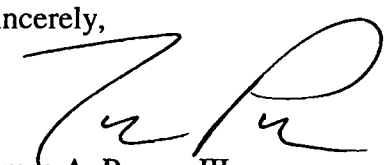
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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,



James A. Person III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JAP/sdk

Ref: ID# 253598

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Jeri L. S. Morey
711 North Carancahua #518
Corpus Christi, Texas 78475
(w/o enclosures)

Ferrell Brown & Associates, Inc.
Attn: David Doyle Brown
720 Everhart Road, Suite C-11
Corpus Christi, Texas 78411
(w/o enclosures)

Ben Boettcher & Associates, Architects, Inc.
Attn: Ben Boettcher
1702 South Market Street
Brenham, Texas 77833
(w/o enclosures)