



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 19, 2006

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77245-1562

OR2006-14934

Dear Ms. Chang:

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# 267205.

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for the report "made by the Construction Management Team" regarding an incident that occurred on June 19, 2006. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.110, 552.117, 552.130, and 552.147 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) general written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted to this office a copy or representative samples of the specific information requested.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling

reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See 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 Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Section 552.103 is a discretionary exception that is intended to protect only the interests of the governmental body and may be waived. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision No. 551 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.103 serves only to protect governmental body's position in litigation and does not itself make information confidential); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). As such section 552.103 does not constitute "other law" that makes information confidential. Although sections 552.101, 552.110, 552.117, and 552.130 are mandatory exceptions to disclosure that can provide a compelling reason to withhold information, because you have not submitted the information for our review, we have no basis for finding it confidential. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released per section 552.302.¹ If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge the ruling in court as outlined below.

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

¹However, we note that section 552.147(b) of the *Government Code* authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

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,



José Vela III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JV/eb

Ref: ID# 267205

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Daniel R. Frettinger
Oscar Renda Construction
522 Benson Lane
Roanoke, Texas 76262
(w/o enclosures)