ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 21, 2007

Mr. Jesus Toscano, Jr.
Administrative Assistant City Attorney
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7BN
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2007-10826

Dear Mr. Toscano:

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# 287195.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for all information pertaining to the Deep Ellum Public Improvement District during a specified period of time. You state that a portion of the responsive information will be released to the requestor. You claim that portions of the submitted information are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107, 552.136, and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.[1]

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body

[1]We assume that the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002).

First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was "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).

Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state that Exhibit B contains confidential communications between city attorneys and employees of the city. You also state that these communications were made in confidence and in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the city. Based on our review of your representations and the submitted information, we find that you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to Exhibit B. Accordingly, we conclude that the city may withhold Exhibit B pursuant to section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

Next, you state that the account numbers you have marked in Exhibit C are excepted from public disclosure under section 552.136. Section 552.136 states in part that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of [the Act], a credit card, debit card, charge card,

or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential." Gov't Code § 552.136(b); *see also id.* § 552.136(a) (defining "access device"). Upon review, we agree that the city must withhold the account numbers that you have marked under section 552.136.

You claim that the e-mail addresses in Exhibit D are excepted from public disclosure under section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 provides as follows:

> (a) Except as otherwise provided by this section, an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.
>
> (b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release.
>
> (c) Subsection (a) does not apply to an e-mail address:
>
> > (1) provided to a governmental body by a person who has a contractual relationship with the governmental body or by the contractor's agent;
> >
> > (2) provided to a governmental body by a vendor who seeks to contract with the governmental body or by the vendor's agent;
> >
> > (3) contained in a response to a request for bids or proposals, contained in a response to similar invitations soliciting offers or information relating to a potential contract, or provided to a governmental body in the course of negotiating the terms of a contract or potential contract; or
> >
> > (4) provided to a governmental body on a letterhead, coversheet, printed document, or other document made available to the public.

Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). You state that the e-mail addresses in Exhibit D do not fall under any of the exceptions to confidentiality under section 552.137(c). Therefore, if the owners of the e-mail addresses did not affirmatively consent to their release, the city must withhold the e-mail addresses under section 552.137(a).

In summary, the city may withhold Exhibit B from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. The account numbers that you have marked must be withheld under section 552.136 of the Government Code. If the owners of the e-mail addresses at issue

consented to their public disclosure, the city may release the addresses under section 552.137(b). Otherwise, the city must withhold the marked e-mail addresses in Exhibit C from disclosure under section 552.137(a). The remaining representative sample 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,

M. Alan Akin
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAA/mcf

Ref: ID# 287195

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Gianna Madrini
President
Deep Ellum Association
3005 Commerce
Dallas, Texas 75226
(w/o enclosures)