



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 5, 2007

Mr. Joseph T. Longoria
Perdue, Brandon, Fielder, Collins, & Mott, L.L.P.
1235 North Loop West, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77008

OR2007-15956

Dear Mr. Longoria:

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# 296319.

The Lubbock Central Appraisal District (the "district"), which you represent, received two requests from the same requestor for "any sales data [the district has] with confirmed prices from sales of commercial property since" January 1, 2006, and the district's 2006-2007 commercial ratio studies, as well as all supporting data used to create the study. You state that some of the requested information will be provided to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.148 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, we address your argument that the submitted information has been previously ruled upon by this office in Open Records Letter No. 2004-7888 (2004) and that the ruling should be relied on as a previous determination. In Open Records Letter No. 2004-7888, we ruled

¹We 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.

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upon the availability of data that was used by the district to determine the 2004 market values for commercial property for which protests had been filed. The information at issue in this request pertains, in part, to the price of commercial property since January 1, 2006, as well as the district's 2006 and 2007 commercial ratio studies. With regard to the submitted information that is identical to the information previously requested and ruled upon by this office in Open Records Letter No. 2004-7888, we conclude that, as we have no indication that the law, facts, and circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have changed, the district must continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2004-7888 as a previous determination. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in a prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure). However, to the extent that the requested information was not the subject of the prior ruling, Open Records Letter No. 2004-7888 cannot be relied on as a previous determination and we will address your arguments. *See id.*

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. Section 22.27(a) of the Tax Code provides the following:

Rendition statements, real and personal property reports, attachments to those statements and reports, and other information the owner of property provides to the appraisal office in connection with the appraisal of the property, including income and expense information related to a property filed with an appraisal office and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office or the comptroller about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential, are confidential and not open to public inspection. The statements and reports and the information they contain about specific real or personal property or a specific real or personal property owner and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential may not be disclosed to anyone other than an employee of the appraisal office who appraises property except as authorized by Subsection (b) of this section.

Tax Code § 22.27(a). We understand that the district is an "appraisal office" for purposes of section 22.27. You state that some of the submitted information is sales information that was obtained from property owners under promises of confidentiality. Based on this representation and our review, we agree that this information is confidential under section 22.27(a) and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

You assert the remaining information at issue is excepted under section 552.148 of the Government Code. Section 552.148 provides in relevant part that “[i]nformation relating to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information received from a private entity by the comptroller or the chief appraiser of an appraisal district under Chapter 6, Tax Code, is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021.” Gov’t Code § 552.148(a). You state that the remaining information at issue consists of real property sales information obtained from private entities. The legislative history of section 552.148 indicates that it was enacted as a result of the issuance of several open records rulings of this office in which we ruled that information provided by Multiple Listing Services to appraisal districts under confidentiality agreements is subject to required public disclosure under the Act. HOUSE COMM. ON STATE AFFAIRS, BILL ANALYSIS, Tex. Comm. Substitute H.B. 2188, 80th Leg., R.S. (2007); *see, e.g.*, Open Records Letter Nos. 2006-07161 (2006), 2006-04628 (2006). Because of these rulings, many multiple listing services stopped providing sales information to appraisal districts. The bill analysis of House Bill 2188 states that the purpose of section 552.148 is to allow the relationships between multiple listing services and appraisal districts to continue. HOUSE COMM. ON STATE AFFAIRS, BILL ANALYSIS, Tex. Comm. Substitute H.B. 2188, 80th Leg., R.S. (2007). Accordingly, because realtors and private appraisers provide information to multiple listing services, the remaining real property sales information that was obtained from realtors and private appraisers is confidential under section 552.148. We also find that, to the extent any remaining real property sales information was obtained from multiple listing services or other similar entities, any such information is confidential under section 552.148. To the extent any remaining information was not obtained from such an entity, it is not confidential under section 552.148 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district may continue to rely upon Open Records Letter No. 2007-7888 with respect to the submitted information that is the subject of the previous ruling. The submitted sales information that was obtained from property owners under promises of confidentiality is confidential under section 22.27(a) of the Tax Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code. The submitted real property sales information that was obtained from realtors, private appraisers, multiple listing services or other similar entities is confidential under section 552.148 of the Government Code. To the extent any remaining information was not obtained from such an entity, it is not confidential under section 552.148 of the Government Code and must be released.

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 file suit in

Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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,



Loan Hong-Turney
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LH/eeg

Ref: ID# 296319

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Abbigail Pendergraft
Patrick O'Connor & Associates, L.P.
2200 N. Loop W., Suite 200
Houston, Texas 77018
(w/o enclosures)