



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 23, 2008

Ms. Cindy J. Crosby
Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP
816 Congress Avenue Suite 1700
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2008-14489

Dear Ms. Crosby:

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# 325948.

The Village of Wimberley (the "village"), which you represent, received a request for information relating to the Crossroads Center. You state that some of the information has been released. You claim that the rest of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* 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. *See* 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

¹Although you also claim the attorney-client and attorney work product privileges under section 552.101 of the Government Code, section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 1-3 (2002). Accordingly, this decision does not address your claims under section 552.101.

facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *See 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. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A)-(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. *See 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 seek to withhold all of the submitted information under section 552.107(1). You state that some of the information consists of communications between attorneys for and representatives of the Village that were made in connection with the rendition of professional legal services to the Village. You state that the remaining information consists of documents drafted by the Village’s attorneys and attorneys’ notes. You have identified some of the individuals to whom the submitted information pertains. You state that the Village’s communications with its attorneys were not intended to be and have not been disclosed to non-privileged parties. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude the Village may withhold most of the submitted information under section 552.107(1). We have marked that information. We conclude that you have not demonstrated that any of the remaining information constitutes or documents a communication between or among privileged parties. Therefore, the Village may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.107(1).

You also raise section 552.111 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure “an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency.” Gov’t Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process.

See Austin v. City of San Antonio, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990). In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, and opinions that reflect a governmental body's policymaking processes. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. The Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (Gov't Code § 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Moreover, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

You claim that the remaining information is protected by the deliberative process privilege. You contend that the remaining information implicates the Village's policymaking processes. Based on your representations, we conclude that the Village may withhold some of the remaining information under section 552.111. We have marked that information. We conclude that the remaining information at issue is either essentially factual or does not otherwise fall within the scope of the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 9 (1990) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.111 not applicable to communication with person or entity with which governmental body has no privity of interest or common deliberative process). Therefore, the Village may not any of the remaining information on that basis under section 552.111.

Section 552.111 also encompasses the attorney work product privilege found at rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.5; *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines attorney work product as consisting of

- (1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party's representatives or among a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

TEX.R.CIV.P. 192.5. A governmental body that seeks to withhold information on the basis of the attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 bears the burden of demonstrating that the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party's representative. *See id.*; ORD 677 at 6-8. In order for this office to conclude that information was created or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied that

(a) a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and (b) the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

Nat'l Tank Co. v. Brotherton, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A "substantial chance" of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather "that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear." *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7.

You contend that the remaining information may constitute attorney work product because the information is related to a matter that could have resulted in litigation. Having considered your argument, we conclude that you have not demonstrated that any of the remaining information consists of material prepared, mental impressions developed, or a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial. Therefore, the Village may not withhold any of the remaining information as attorney work product under section 552.111.

We note that the remaining information includes a personal e-mail address. Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure certain personal e-mail addresses of members of the public that are provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body, unless the owner of the e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure.² *See* Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(b). The types of e-mail addresses listed in section 552.137(c) may not be withheld under this exception. *See id.* § 552.137(c). Likewise, section 552.137 is not applicable to an institutional e-mail address, an Internet website address, or an e-mail address that a governmental entity maintains for

²Unlike other exceptions to disclosure under the Act, this office will raise section 552.137 on behalf of a governmental body, as this exception is mandatory and may not be waived. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.007, .352; Open Records Decision No. 674 at 3 n.4 (2001) (mandatory exceptions).

one of its officials or employees. The Village must withhold the e-mail address that we have marked under section 552.137 unless the owner has affirmatively consented to its disclosure.

In summary: (1) the Village may withhold the information that we have marked under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code; and (2) the Village must withhold the marked e-mail address under section 552.137 of the Government Code unless the owner has consented to its disclosure. The rest of the submitted information 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). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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).

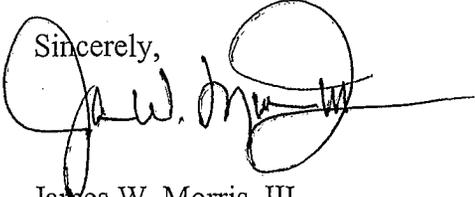
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/jh

Ref: ID# 325948

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Ryan Willett
13501 RR 12 #103
Wimberley, Texas 78676
(w/o enclosures)