



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

GREG ABBOTT

February 27, 2009

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2009-02596

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# 336116.

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for several categories of information regarding security guard and janitorial services for all of the facilities overseen by the city's General Services Department. Although you take no position on the requested information, you state it may contain proprietary information subject to exception under the Act. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, the city notified AlliedBarton Security Services LLC ("AlliedBarton") and Aramark of the request for information and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from AlliedBarton and Aramark. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Initially, we note AlliedBarton argues to withhold from public disclosure certain information that the city did not submit. This ruling does not address information that was not submitted by the city and is limited to the information submitted as responsive by the city. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D) (governmental body requesting decision from Attorney General must submit copy of specific information requested).

¹To the extent any additional responsive information existed on the date the city received this request, we assume you have released it. If you have not released any such records, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

Next, AlliedBarton argues that portions of its information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.102 of the Government Code. Section 552.102 excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” *Id.* § 552.102(a). This office has found that section 552.102 only applies to information in the personnel files of governmental employees. The information AlliedBarton seeks to withhold is not contained in the personnel file of a city employee; therefore, section 552.102 is not applicable to AlliedBarton’s information and the city may not withhold any of the submitted information on that ground.

AlliedBarton and Aramark both claim portions of their information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects: (1) trade secrets, and (2) commercial or financial information, the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. *See id.* § 552.110(a), (b). Section 552.110(a) protects the proprietary interests of private parties by excepting from disclosure trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *See id.* § 552.110(a). A “trade secret”

may consist of any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one’s business, and which gives [one] an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business, as for example the amount or other terms of a secret bid for a contract or the salary of certain employees A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. Generally it relates to the production of goods, as for example, a machine or formula for the production of an article. It may, however, relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex. 1958); Open Records Decision Nos. 255 (1980), 232 (1979), 217 (1978).

There are six factors to be assessed in determining whether information qualifies as a trade secret:

(1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company’s] business;

- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and to [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing this information; and
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also* ORD 232. This office must accept a claim that information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for exemption is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. Open Records Decision No. 552 (1990). However, we cannot conclude that section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown that the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.* § 552.110(b); *see also Nat’l Parks & Conservation Ass’n v. Morton*, 498 F.2d 765 (D.C. Cir. 1974); Open Records Decision No. 661 (1999).

AlliedBarton and Aramark claim section 552.110(a) for portions of their submitted information. Having considered their arguments, we conclude that both companies have established a *prima facie* case that a portion of their submitted information, which we have marked, constitutes a trade secret. Therefore, the city must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. We note Aramark has published some customer information on its website. Thus, Aramark has failed to demonstrate the information it has published on its website is a trade secret. Further, AlliedBarton and Aramark have failed to demonstrate any portion of their remaining information at issue constitutes a trade secret. Thus, the remaining information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

AlliedBarton and Aramark also argue section 552.110(b) for portions of their remaining information. Upon review, we find AlliedBarton has established release of some of its remaining information at issue would cause it substantial competitive injury; therefore, the

city must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. However, we find AlliedBarton and Aramark have failed to provide specific factual evidence demonstrating that release of any of their remaining information at issue would result in substantial competitive harm to either company. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 661 (for information to be withheld under commercial or financial information prong of section 552.110, business must show by specific factual evidence that substantial competitive injury would result from release of particular information at issue), 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts is too speculative), 319 at 3 (1982) (information relating to organization and personnel, professional references, market studies, qualifications, and pricing are not ordinarily excepted from disclosure under statutory predecessor to section 552.110). Furthermore, we note that the pricing information of a winning bidder is generally not excepted under section 552.110(b). This office considers the prices charged in government contract awards to be a matter of strong public interest. *See* Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors). *See generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview, 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). Accordingly, we determine that no portion of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110(b).

We note portions of the remaining information are subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code.² Section 552.136 of the Government Code states “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, 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. Upon review, we find the city must withhold the insurance policy numbers we have marked under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

In summary, the city must withhold the information we have marked pursuant to sections 552.110 and 552.136 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php.

²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/jb

Ref: ID# 336116

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

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