



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 12, 2009

Mr. Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant City Attorney
City of Corpus Christi
P.O. Box 9277
Corpus Christi, Texas 78469-9277

OR2009-03319

Dear Mr. Bounds:

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# 336966.

The City of Corpus Christi (the "city") received a request for water usage information pertaining to a specified address from October 2008 to the date of the request. You claim that portions of the submitted water bills are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

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. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 182.052 of the Utilities Code, which provides in part:

(a) Except as provided by Section 182.054, a government-operated utility may not disclose personal information in a customer's account record, or any information relating to the volume or units of utility usage or the amounts billed to or collected from the individual for utility usage, if the customer requests that the government-operated utility keep the information confidential. However, a government-operated utility may disclose

information related to the customer's volume or units of utility usage or amounts billed to or collected from the individual for utility usage if the primary source of water for such utility was a sole-source designated aquifer.

(b) A customer may request confidentiality by delivering to the government-operated utility an appropriately marked form provided under Subsection (c)(3) or any other written request for confidentiality.

Util. Code § 182.052(a)-(b). "Personal information" under section 182.052(a) means an individual's address, telephone number, or social security number. *See id.* § 182.051(4); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 625 (1994) (construing statutory predecessor). Water service is included in the scope of utility services covered by section 182.052. Util. Code § 182.051(3). Section 182.054 of the Utilities Code provides six exceptions to the disclosure prohibition found in section 182.052. *See id.* § 182.054.

You assert that the personal and utility usage information within the submitted bills is confidential under section 182.052. You inform this office that the customer at issue elected to keep this information confidential prior to the date the city received the present request for information. You also state that none of the exceptions to confidentiality under section 182.054 apply in this instance. Finally, you state that the primary source of water for the city's utility services is not a sole-source designated aquifer. Based on your representations and our review, the city must withhold the personal information of the customer at issue, as well as any information relating to the volume or units of utility usage and the amounts billed to or collected for utility usage for this customer, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 182.052 of the Utilities Code.

We note that the remaining information at issue includes this customer's utility account number. Section 552.136 states 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."¹ Gov't Code § 552.136(b); *see id.* § 552.136(a) (defining "access device"). This office has found that customer utility account numbers are access device numbers for purposes of section 552.136. Therefore, the city must withhold the utility account number we have marked under section 552.136.

In summary, the city must withhold the personal information of the customer at issue, as well as any information relating to the volume or units of utility usage and the amounts billed to or collected for utility usage for this customer under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 182.052 of the Utilities Code. The city must also withhold

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

the utility account number we have marked under section 552.136. The remaining information must be released.

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, 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,



Reg Hargrove
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJH/eeg

Ref: ID# 336966

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)