



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

April 28, 2010

Ms. Cary Grace  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Austin Law Department  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2010-06073

Dear Ms. Grace:

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# 378391.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for "information about why [a specified subdivision] has been red tagged" and complaints filed by or against a named developer or his company. You state you have released some information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.107 of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>2</sup>

You assert a portion of the submitted information is excepted under section 552.103 of the Government Code, which provides in part as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> You state the city withdraws its previously asserted claim under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

<sup>2</sup> We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). The governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). The purpose of section 552.103 is to protect the litigation interests of governmental bodies that are parties to the litigation at issue. See Gov't Code § 552.103(a); Open Records Decision No. 638 at 2 (1996) (section 552.103 only protects the litigation interests of the governmental body claiming the exception).

You inform us, and provide documentation showing, that prior to the city's receipt of the request for information, Travis County (the "county") filed a lawsuit for violations of land development regulations against the developer styled Cause No. D-1-GV-09-000641, *Travis County, Texas vs. Vlado Ruzicka, Karen Ruzicka, Nicholas Peter, Inc., Ruzicka Real Estate, Inc., Mountain View Austin Property Owners Association, Inc.* in the 419th District Court of Travis County. You state an attorney for the county has reviewed the information at issue and requested it be withheld to protect the county's position in the pending litigation. Based on your representations and our review, we find litigation was pending on the date the city received the request for information. Additionally, we agree the information at issue relates to the pending litigation. Accordingly, we find section 552.103 of the Government Code is generally applicable to the information at issue.

We note, however, the purpose of section 552.103 is to enable a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties to obtain information that is related to litigation through discovery procedures. See ORD 551 at 4-5. Thus, information that has

either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. A portion of the information you have marked under section 552.103 consists of communications with the opposing party to the litigation. We have marked these communications. Accordingly, the city may withhold the information at issue, with the exception of the communications we have marked for release, under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

You assert portions of the remaining information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code, which protects information coming 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. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate 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 a capacity other than that of attorney). Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). 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 pet.). 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 the remaining information you have marked constitutes communications between assistant city attorneys and the management and personnel of city departments that were made for the purpose of providing legal advice to the city. You have identified the parties to the communications. You state that these communications were made in confidence and have maintained their confidentiality. Based on your representations and our review, we find

the information at issue constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. Therefore, the city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107 of the Government Code.

In summary, except for the information we have marked for release, the city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.103 of the Government Code. The city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.107 of the Government Code. 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](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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Mack T. Harrison  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MTH/rl

Ref: ID# 378391

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)