



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 18, 2010

Mr. Warren M. S. Ernst
Chief of the General Counsel Division
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7DN
Dallas, Texas 75201

Mr. Michael Bostic
Assistant City Attorney
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7DN
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2010-15768

Dear Mr. Ernst and Mr. Bostic:

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# 397156.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for the stock purchase agreement between Forest City Residential Group, Inc. ("Forest City") and Hamilton Atmos, L.P. ("Atmos") and any drafts, notes, and correspondence regarding the agreement's subject matter from December 1, 2008 to March 3, 2009. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. You also state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Forest City and Atmos. Accordingly, you notified Forest City and Atmos of the request and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from Forest City and Atmos. We have also received and considered arguments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304

(interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides in relevant part:

(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.

Id. § 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 question of whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must furnish concrete evidence that litigation involving a specific matter is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. *Id.* Concrete evidence to support a claim litigation is reasonably anticipated may include, for example, the governmental body's receipt of a letter containing a specific threat

¹We 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.

to sue the governmental body from an attorney for a potential opposing party.² Open Records Decision No. 555 (1990); *see* Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989) (litigation must be "realistically contemplated"). On the other hand, this office has determined that if an individual publicly threatens to bring suit against a governmental body, but does not actually take objective steps toward filing suit, litigation is not reasonably anticipated. *See* Open Records Decision No. 331 (1982).

You inform this office, and provide documentation showing, that prior to the submission of the request for information, the requestor filed a complaint with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") against the city alleging violations of the federal Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-3619. You assert the submitted information is related to the subject matter of the HUD complaint. You explain if HUD determines there is reasonable cause to believe an unlawful discriminatory housing practice has occurred, HUD will issue a charge, and the city has the right to choose whether to have the case heard by an administrative law judge or have the matter referred to the appropriate United States district court. Even if HUD dismisses the complaint, you explain the complainant has the right to file an individual lawsuit against the city under the Fair Housing Law. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted documentation, we conclude you have established litigation was reasonably anticipated when the city received the request for information. In a letter to this office, the requestor argues the requested information is not related to his HUD complaint. The submitted information pertains to an agreement between Forest City and Atmos to redevelop a portion of the city's downtown area. In his HUD complaint, the requestor alleges the city has engaged in discrimination while redeveloping the city's downtown area. Further, the city notes HUD requested the submitted information in its investigation of the city. Thus, we agree the submitted information relates to the anticipated litigation. Therefore, we find the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.103.

We note, however, once the information has been obtained by all parties to the anticipated litigation, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision No. 349 at 2 (1982). We also note the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation has concluded or is no longer anticipated. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982) at 2; Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2 (1982). As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure.

²In addition, this office has concluded litigation was reasonably anticipated when the potential opposing party took the following objective steps toward litigation: filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *see* Open Records Decision No. 336 (1982); hired an attorney who made a demand for disputed payments and threatened to sue if the payments were not made promptly, *see* Open Records Decision No. 346 (1982); and threatened to sue on several occasions and hired an attorney, *see* Open Records Decision No. 288 (1981).

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, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Ana Carolina Vieira
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ACV/tp

Ref: ID# 397156

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)