



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 11, 2011

Mr. Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant City Attorney
City of Corpus Christi
P.O. Box 9277
Corpus Christi, Texas 78469-2977

OR2011-09734

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# 423298.

The City of Corpus Christi (the "city") received a request for the winning proposals for five specified bid invitation numbers. Although you raise no exceptions to disclosure of the submitted information, you believe release of the requested information may implicate the proprietary interests of third parties. Accordingly, you provide documentation showing you have notified Concentra Medical Centers ("Concentra"), McLemore Building Maintenance, Inc. ("McLemore"), and Pais Enterprises, LLC ("Pais") of the request and their right to submit arguments to this office. *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 Pais. We have considered Pais' arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

We first note an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this ruling, we have not received comments from Concentra or McLemore. Thus, we

have no basis to conclude these two entities have any protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110(a)-(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the information at issue on the basis of any proprietary interests Concentra or McLemore may have in the information.

Pais argues portions of its information are excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects the proprietary interests of private parties by excepting from disclosure (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 Gov't Code* § 552.110(a)-(b).

Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of a "trade secret" from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts. *See Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763 (Tex. 1957); *see also* Open Record Decision No. 552 (1990). Section 757 defines a "trade secret" to be

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him 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 a single or ephemeral event in the conduct of the business A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. . . . [It may] 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 Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776. This office will accept a private person's claim for exception as valid under section 552.110(a) if that person establishes a *prima facie* case for the exception, and no one submits an argument that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. *See* ORD 552 at 5. However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown the information meets the

definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim.¹ Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) 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. See Open Record Decision No. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (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).

Pais argues that its staffing levels, equipment inventory, and customer list are information potential competitors could use to undermine Pais in future bidding negotiations. Upon review, we find Pais has established a *prima facie* case that its customer list, which we have marked, constitutes trade secret information for purposes of section 552.110(a). Accordingly, the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110(a). However, we find Pais has not demonstrated the remaining information it seeks to withhold constitutes trade secrets for purposes of section 552.110(a). See ORD 402 (section 552.110(a) does not apply unless information meets definition of trade secret and necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish trade secret claim). In addition, we find Pais has not established by a factual or evidentiary showing that release of the remaining information at issue would cause the company substantial competitive injury for purposes of section 552.110(b). See Open Records Decision Nos. 661 (for information to be withheld under commercial or financial information prong of section 552.110, business must show specific factual evidence that substantial competitive injury would result from release of particular information at issue), 319 (1982) (information relating to organization, personnel, qualifications, and experience not excepted by statutory predecessor to section 552.110), 306 (1982) (information regarding personnel to be assigned to a project not excepted by statutory predecessor to section 552.110). Therefore, the city may not withhold any portion of Pais' remaining information under subsection 552.110(a) or (b). As no additional exceptions to disclosure have been raised, 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.

¹The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret: (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company]; (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 [its] competitors; (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information; (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others. Restatement of Torts § 757 cmt. b; see also Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

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,



Misty Haberer Barham
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MHB/dls

Ref: ID # 423298

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

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