



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 5, 2011

Ms. Elaine Nicholson
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2011-14443

Dear Ms. Nicolson:

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# 432030.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for eight categories of information pertaining to a complaint made by the requestor against a named city employee, a specified development and subdivision, and the provision of electrical service to a specified area. We understand you will make some of the requested information available for inspection by the requestor upon payment. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered your claimed exceptions and reviewed the submitted information. We have also received and considered comments from the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes 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 that 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. *See* 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, 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, orig. proceeding). 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 that the information in Exhibit A consists of communications between attorneys for the city and city employees, all of whom you have identified. You state that these communications were made in furtherance of the rendition of legal services to the city, and you inform this office that these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we agree that the information at issue constitutes privileged attorney-client communications. Accordingly, the city may withhold Exhibit A under section 552.107 of the Government Code.

You next claim Exhibit B is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Section 552.111 excepts from disclosure “an interagency or intra-agency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency.” Gov’t Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the attorney work product privilege found in rule 192.5 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. *City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 360 (Tex. 2000); Open Records Decision No. 677 at 4-8 (2002). Rule 192.5 defines work product as

- (1) material prepared or mental impressions developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for a party or a party’s representatives, including the party’s attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees, or agents; or

(2) a communication made in anticipation of litigation or for trial between a party and the party's representatives or among a party's representatives, including the party's attorneys, consultants, sureties, indemnitors, insurers, employees or agents.

Tex. R. Civ. P. 192.5. In order for this office to conclude the information was made or developed in anticipation of litigation, we must be satisfied

a reasonable person would have concluded from the totality of the circumstances surrounding the investigation that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue; and . . . the party resisting discovery believed in good faith that there was a substantial chance that litigation would ensue and [created or obtained the information] for the purpose of preparing for such litigation.

Nat'l Tank Co. v. Brotherton, 851 S.W.2d 193, 207 (Tex. 1993). A "substantial chance" of litigation does not mean a statistical probability, but rather "that litigation is more than merely an abstract possibility or unwarranted fear." *Id.* at 204; ORD 677 at 7. In the case of a communication, a governmental body must show the communication was between a party and the party's representatives. ORD 677 at 7-8. A governmental body seeking to withhold information under this exception bears the burden of demonstrating the information was created or developed for trial or in anticipation of litigation by or for a party or a party's representative. Tex. R. Civ. P. 192.5; ORD 677 at 6-8.

You state Exhibit B pertains to a dispute between the city and the requestor concerning the construction of a subdivision. You state the dispute resulted in a lawsuit styled *Tom Jones Homes, Inc. v. The City of Austin, Texas*, Cause No. D-1-GN-08-001277 in the 200th Judicial District Court of Travis County, Texas. You further state the information at issue consists of information created or developed during this litigation by attorneys for the city and that the information contains their mental impressions, opinions, conclusions, and legal theories. Accordingly, we find the city may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

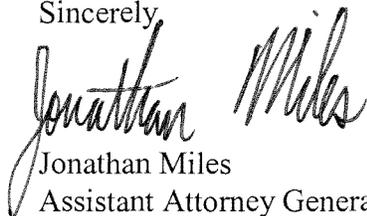
In summary, the city may withhold Exhibit A under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The city may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Miles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

Jonathan Miles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JM/em

Ref: ID# 432030

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)