



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 16, 2011

Ms. Nan Rodriguez
Deputy City Attorney
City of Temple
2 North Main Street, Suite 308
Temple, Texas 76501

OR2011-18522

Dear Ms. Rodriguez:

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# 440079.

The City of Temple (the "city") received a request for the building permits, building plans, the city's inspection reports, and the contractor's bonds related to a specified construction project. Although you take no position with respect to the requested information, you state release of the requested information may implicate the proprietary interests of Mueller, Inc. ("Mueller"). You state you have notified Mueller of this request and of the company's right to submit arguments to this office stating why its information should not be released. *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).

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. Pursuant to section 552.301(e) of the Government Code, the governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) general written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to

indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. Gov't Code § 552.301(e). As of the date of this letter, you have not submitted to this office a copy of the information requested or a representative sample thereof. Thus, we find the city failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the information is public and must be released. Information presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Normally, a compelling reason to withhold information exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third-party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because third party interests are at stake, we will address whether the requested information must be withheld to protect the interests of the third party.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of a governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) of the Government Code to submit its reasons, if any, as to why requested information relating to that party should be withheld from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, Mueller has not submitted comments to this office explaining why any portion of the requested information should not be released to the requestor. Thus, we have no basis to conclude the release of any portion of the requested information would implicate Mueller's proprietary interests, and none of the information may be withheld on that basis. *See id.* § 552.110; Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (stating that business enterprise that claims exception for commercial or financial information under section 552.110(b) must show by specific factual evidence 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). Further, because you have not submitted any of the responsive information, we have no basis for finding it confidential. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code. If you believe the requested information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 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 cursive script, appearing to read "Jennifer Burnett", followed by a horizontal line.

Jennifer Burnett
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JB/dls

Ref: ID# 440079

No enclosures

c: Requestor

Mueller, Inc.
P.O. Box 1044
Temple, Texas 76503