



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

September 30, 2013

Ms. Katie Gomez  
Office Assistant  
Legal Department  
City of Temple  
2 North Main Street, Suite 308  
Temple, Texas 76501

OR2013-16972

Dear Ms. Gomez:

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# 500726.

The City of Temple (the "city") received a request for all responses submitted for Request for Qualifications ("RFQ") No. 11-01-13-0-2013 pertaining to services for a compressed natural gas fueling facility. Although you take no position with respect to the public availability of the requested information, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of CNG Energy Partners, LLC ("CNG"), Mansfield Gas Equipment Systems ("Mansfield"), Transtar Energy Company LP dba Clean Energy ("Clean Energy"), Questar Fueling Company ("Questar"), and ZeitEnergy, LLC and Freese and Nichols, Inc. ("ZeitEnergy"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you have notified these third parties of the request for information and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permitted governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under the circumstances). We received comments from Questar. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the city's procedural obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code when requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(b) of the Government Code, a governmental body must ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days after receiving the request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Pursuant to section 552.301(e), within fifteen business days of receipt of the request the governmental body must submit to this office (1) 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. *Id.* § 552.301(e). The city received the request for information on April 4, 2013. Thus, the city's ten-business-day deadline under section 552.301(b) was April 18, 2013, and its fifteen-business-day deadline under section 552.301(e) was April 25, 2013. Although the city provided us a copy of the request for information by April 17, 2013, the envelope in which the city provided the remaining information required by section 552.301 is postmarked July 23, 2013. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, we find the city failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code.

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 requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information from disclosure. *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, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, 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. Because third party interests are at stake in this instance, we will consider whether the information at issue must be withheld under the Act.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from CNG, Mansfield, Clean Energy, or ZeitEnergy explaining why their submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude these third parties have a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; 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 the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest CNG, Mansfield, Clean Energy, or ZeitEnergy may have in the information.

Questar argues its information was supplied with the expectation of confidentiality. However, information is not confidential under the Act simply because the party submitting the information anticipates or requests that it be kept confidential. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 677 (Tex. 1976). In other words, a governmental body cannot, through an agreement or contract, overrule or repeal provisions of the Act. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 3 (1990) (“[T]he obligations of a governmental body under [the predecessor to the Act] cannot be compromised simply by its decision to enter into a contract.”), 203 at 1 (1978) (mere expectation of confidentiality by person supplying information does not satisfy requirements of statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.110). Consequently, unless the information falls within an exception to disclosure, it must be released, notwithstanding any expectations or agreement specifying otherwise.

Questar raises section 552.110(b) of the Government Code for portions of its submitted information. Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure 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. *Id.*; *see also* ORD 661 at 5.

In advancing its arguments, we understand Questar to rely, in part, on the test pertaining to the applicability of the section 552(b)(4) exemption under the federal Freedom of Information Act to third-party information held by a federal agency, as announced in *National Parks & Conservation Association v. Morton*, 498 F.2d 765 (D.C. Cir. 1974). The *National Parks* test provides that commercial or financial information is confidential if disclosure of information is likely to impair a governmental body’s ability to obtain necessary information in the future. *National Parks*, 498 F.2d at 765. Although this office once applied the *National Parks* test under the statutory predecessor to section 552.110, that standard was overturned by the Third Court of Appeals when it held *National Parks* was not a judicial decision within the meaning of former section 552.110. *See Birnbaum v. Alliance of Am. Insurers*, 994 S.W.2d 766 (Tex. App.—Austin 1999, pet. denied). Section 552.110(b) now expressly states the standard to be applied and requires a specific factual demonstration that the release of the information in question would cause the business enterprise that submitted the information substantial competitive harm. *See* ORD 661 at 5-6 (discussing enactment of section 552.110(b) by Seventy-sixth Legislature). The ability of a governmental body to continue to obtain information from private parties is not a relevant

consideration under section 552.110(b). *Id.* Therefore, we will consider only Questar's interest in the submitted information.

Questar claims portions of the submitted information constitute commercial or financial information that, if released would cause Questar and its affiliated companies substantial competitive harm. Upon review, we find Questar has demonstrated portions of the information at issue constitute commercial or financial information, the release of which would cause substantial competitive injury. Accordingly, the city must withhold this information, which we have marked, under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. However, we find Questar has made only conclusory allegations that the release of any of its remaining information would result in substantial harm to its competitive position. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 661 (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), 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts is too speculative). Accordingly, none of Questar's remaining information may be withheld under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code.

We note some of the materials at issue may be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; *see* Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit.

In summary, the city must withhold the information we have marked under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. The city must release the remaining information; however, any information that is subject to copyright may be released only in accordance with copyright law.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup>We note the information being released contains a partial social security number. Section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.147(b).

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Cynthia G. Tynan  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

CGT/ag

Ref: ID# 500726

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. John Byrd  
Mansfield Gas Equipment Systems  
4280 East Lowell Street  
Ontario, CA 91761-1529  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Andre N. Litster  
Questar Fueling Company  
P.O. Box 45433  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84145-0433  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. John H. Carney  
CNG Energy Partners, L.L.C.  
4280 East Lowell Street  
Ontario, CA 91761-1529  
(w/o enclosures)

ZeitEnergy, LLC  
c/o Katie Gomez  
Office Assistant  
Legal Department  
City of Temple  
2 North Main Street, Suite 308  
Temple, Texas 76501  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Reagan Noll  
Clean Energy  
8117 Preston Road, Suite 202  
Dallas, Texas 75225  
(w/o enclosures)