



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 28, 2013

Ms. Linda Vourazeris
Assistant City Secretary
City of Katy
P.O. Box 617
Katy, Texas 77492-0617

OR2013-18716

Dear Ms. Vourazeris:

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# 504277.

The City of Katy (the "city") received a request for blueprints of a specified building. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Newell's Designs. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Newell's Designs of the request for information and of its 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) (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 reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Further, pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records

request (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. *See id.* § 552.301(e). The city received the request for information on July 24, 2013. You do not inform us the city was closed for any business days between July 24, 2013, and August 14, 2013. Accordingly, you were required to provide the information required by subsection 552.301(b) by August 7, 2013. Moreover, you were required to provide the information required by subsection 552.301(e) by August 14, 2013. Although the city timely provided the request for information on July 25, 2013, we note the envelope in which the city provided the remaining information required by subsections 552.301(b) and 552.301(e) was postmarked August 26, 2013. *See id.* § 552.308(a)(1) (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Accordingly, we conclude the city failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless there is a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342 (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); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a governmental body may demonstrate a compelling reason to withhold information by showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests. *See* ORD 630. Because third party interests are at stake, we will consider whether the submitted information may be withheld from disclosure.

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 Newell's Designs explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude Newell's Designs has 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 Newell's Designs may have in the information. As no exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the submitted information must be released.

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.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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 504277

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Newell Cheatheam CPBD
Newell's Designs
22531 Lost Creek
Katy, Texas 77450
(w/o enclosures)