



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 17, 2014

Ms. Natasha J. Martin
Counsel for the City of Liberty Hill
Bojorquez Law Firm, PLLC
12325 Hymeadow Drive, Suite 2-100
Austin, Texas 78750

OR2014-22943

Dear Ms. Martin:

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# 547499.

The City of Liberty Hill (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for the information provided by all respondents in response to a specified request for proposals, including proposals, follow-up questions, responses, meeting minutes, attendance, and any proposed or final agreements relating to the procurement of such services. You state you will make some of the requested information available to the requestor. Although you take no position as to whether the remaining requested information is excepted under the Act, you state release of this information may implicate the proprietary interests of third parties. Accordingly, you state you 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(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 obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. 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. Gov't Code § 552.301(e). You state the city received the request for information on September 26, 2014. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Accordingly, we find the city failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released. Information that is 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). 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.

We note 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. Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). However, as of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from a third party explaining why its information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude a third party has a protected proprietary interest in any of the requested 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 requested information based upon the proprietary interests of any third parties. Thus, we have no choice but to order the city to release the requested information in accordance with section 552.302 of the Government Code. If you believe this 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.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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kenny Moreland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kenny Moreland
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KJM/som

Ref: ID# 547499

c: Requestor