



February 22, 2002

Mr. John Steiner
Division Chief
City of Austin - Law Department
P.O. Box 1546
Austin, Texas 78767-1546

OR2002-0856

Dear Mr. Steiner:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 159528.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for copies of the compliance plans for the two apparent low bidders related to C.I.P. No. 8931-877-0008. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.104 of the Government Code. You state that the city wishes to withhold only portions of the requested information. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that the requested information is excepted from disclosure based on section 552.104 of the Government Code. Section 552.104 states that information is excepted from required public disclosure if release of the information would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. The purpose of this exception is to protect the interests of a governmental body usually in competitive bidding situations. *See Open Records Decision No. 592 (1991)*. This exception protects information from public disclosure if the governmental body demonstrates potential harm to its interests in a particular competitive situation. *See Open Records Decision No. 463 (1987)*. Generally, section 552.104 does not except bids from public disclosure after bidding is completed and the contract has been awarded. *See Open Records Decision 541 (1990)*.

In this case, you inform us that no contract has been awarded at this time. You state that, in the event negotiations fail and the city must solicit additional bids, release of the submitted

information will compromise the city's negotiating position, because new proposers will know what terms the city was willing to negotiate. We therefore conclude that the information is excepted from disclosure based on section 552.104 until such time as the contract is awarded. Although section 552.104 authorizes you to withhold the remaining information from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.007.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or

complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/seg

Ref: ID# 159528

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Betty Gawlikowski
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