OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

February 26, 2003

Mr. Brad Norton
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1546
Austin, Texas 78767-1546

OR2003-1226

Dear Mr. Norton:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 177020.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for three categories of information from the Custom Masonry certification file. You state that you will release a portion of the requested information to the requestor. However, you claim that a portion of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.128 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.128 of the Government Code provides as follows:

> (a) Information submitted by a potential vendor or contractor to a governmental body in connection with an application for certification as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business under a local, state, or federal certification program is excepted from [required public disclosure], except as provided by this section.
>
> (b) Notwithstanding Section 552.007 and except as provided by Subsection (c), the information may be disclosed only:
>
> > (1) to a state or local governmental entity in this state, and the state or local governmental entity may use the information only:
> >
> > > (A) for purposes related to verifying an applicant's status as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business; or
> > >
> > > (B) for the purpose of conducting a study of a public purchasing program established under state law for historically underutilized or disadvantaged businesses; or

> (2) with the express written permission of the applicant or the applicant's agent.
>
> (c) Information submitted by a vendor or contractor or a potential vendor or contractor to a governmental body in connection with a specific proposed contractual relationship, a specific contract, or an application to be placed on a bidders list, including information that may also have been submitted in connection with an application for certification as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business, is subject to required disclosure, excepted from required disclosure, or confidential in accordance with other law.

You state that the submitted information was submitted to the "City of Austin's Department of Small and Minority Business Resources by a vendor or contractor in connection with an application for certification as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business under the City of Austin's certification program." Further, it does not appear that the requestor is a state or local governmental entity under section 552.128(b)(1). You also state that the requestor has not provided the city with express written permission of the applicant or the applicant's agent to release the information under section 552.128(b)(2). Subsection (c) does not apply here. Therefore, we conclude that the submitted information is confidential under section 552.128 of the Government Code and must not be released.

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 Dep't of Pub. 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,

W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/lmt

Ref: ID# 177020

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Adrienne Deal
Law Office of Bill White
608 West 12th Street, Suite B
Austin, Texas 78701
(w/o enclosures)