



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

April 13, 2004

Mr. Brad Norton  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Austin  
P. O. Box 1088  
Austin, Texas 78767-8845

OR2004-2976

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# 199411.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified prospective contract and the supply of natural gas to "Sand Hill." You claim that some of the requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.110 and 552.133 of the Government Code. You indicate that the release of some of the requested information may implicate the proprietary interests of Kinder Morgan South Texas Pipeline, L.P. and TXU. Thus, you state that you notified each of these companies of the city's receipt of the request for information and of each company's right to submit arguments to us as to why any portion of the information at issue should not be released to the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under Public Information Act (the "Act") in certain circumstances). We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample documents.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We assume that the representative sample of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.133 of the Government Code. Section 552.133 excepts from disclosure a public power utility's information related to a competitive matter. Section 552.133(b) provides:

Information or records are excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if the information or records are reasonably related to a competitive matter, as defined in this section. Excepted information or records include the text of any resolution of the public power utility governing body determining which issues, activities, or matters constitute competitive matters. Information or records of a municipally owned utility that are reasonably related to a competitive matter are not subject to disclosure under this chapter, whether or not, under the Utilities Code, the municipally owned utility has adopted customer choice or serves in a multiply certificated service area. This section does not limit the right of a public power utility governing body to withhold from disclosure information deemed to be within the scope of any other exception provided for in this chapter, subject to the provisions of this chapter.

Gov't Code § 552.133(b). Section 552.133(a)(3) defines a "competitive matter" as a matter the public power utility governing body in good faith determines by vote to be related to the public power utility's competitive activity, and the release of which would give an advantage to competitors or prospective competitors. *See id.* § 552.133(a)(3). However, section 552.133(a)(3) also provides thirteen categories of information that may not be deemed competitive matters. *See id.* The attorney general may conclude that section 552.133 is inapplicable to the requested information only if, based on the information provided, the attorney general determines the public power utility governing body has not acted in good faith in determining that the issue, matter, or activity is a competitive matter or that the information requested is not reasonably related to a competitive matter. *See id.* § 552.133(c).

We find that the copy of "Resolution No. 010910-12" that you submitted to us for review constitutes a resolution of the city as governing body of a municipal utility determining issues, activities, or other matters which constitute "competitive matters." We note that the resolution defines the requested information to be within the scope of the term "competitive matter." Further, we find that the submitted information is not among the thirteen categories of information expressly exempted from the definition of competitive matter, and based on the information provided in connection with this request, we cannot conclude that the city failed to act in good faith. Consequently, we agree that the submitted information is a

competitive matter in accordance with the city's resolution and, therefore, is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.133 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup> Because we base our ruling on section 552.133 of the Government Code, we need not address any claims regarding section 552.110 of the Government Code.

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,



Ronald J. Bounds  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

RJB/lmt

Ref: ID# 199411

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Stefan Wray  
Inconmedia  
P.O. Box 716  
Austin, Texas 78767  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. James Goddard  
Hunton & Williams, LLP  
Energy Plaza, 30<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1601 Bryan Street  
Dallas, Texas 75201-3402  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Donald W. Fowler, P.E., President  
Fowler Energy Company  
4520 Spicewood Springs Road  
Austin, Texas 78759  
(w/o enclosures)