



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 29, 2004

Ms. M. Susan Rice, PC
Attorney and Counselor at Law
3900 Essex, Suite 560
Houston, Texas 77027

OR2004-8267

Dear Ms. Rice:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 210086.

The New Property Owners Association of Newport, Inc. (the "association"), which you represent, received a request for three categories of information pertaining to association board members, specified association board meeting minutes, and the association's "rules, regulations, by-laws, etc." You claim that the association is not subject to the Public Information Act ("the Act") pursuant to section 552.0036 of the Government Code. We have considered your arguments and have reviewed the submitted information.

We note that chapter 552 is only applicable to public information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.021. Section 552.002 of the Government Code defines public information as "information that is collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business: (1) by a governmental body; or (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body owns the information or has a right of access to it." Section 552.0036 of the Act states:

A property owners' association is subject to [the Act] in the same manner as a governmental body if:

- (1) membership in the property owners' association is mandatory for owners or for a defined class of owners of private real property in a defined geographic area in a county with a population of 2.8 million or more or in a county adjacent to a county with a population of 2.8 million or more;

(2) the property owners' association has the power to make mandatory special assessments for capital improvements or mandatory regular assessments; and

(3) the amount of the mandatory special or regular assessments is or has ever been based in whole or in part on the value at which the state or a local governmental body assesses the property for purposes of ad valorem taxation under Section 20, Article VIII, Texas Constitution.

Gov't Code § 552.0036. You inform us that the association is a non-profit association of property owners in the Newport subdivision, Harris County, Texas. We note that a private property owners' association is subject to the Act only if it meets all three of the requirements specified by section 552.0036. Although you acknowledge that the association meets the first two requirements, you inform us that the association "does not now and never has based its mandatory special or regular assessments in whole or part on the value at which the state or local government body assesses the property for purposes of ad valorem taxation under Section 20, Article VIII of the Texas Constitution[.]" Based on your representations, we find that, because the association does not meet all three of the requirements as prescribed in section 552.0036, the association is not subject to the Act and need not respond to this request for information.

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,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/krl

Ref: ID# 210086

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. David Taylor
Editor, The Sentinel Newspapers
c/o M. Susan Rice, PC
Attorney and Counselor at Law
3900 Essex, Suite 560
Houston, Texas 77027
(w/o enclosures)