



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 6, 2007

Mr. Frank J. Garza
Davidson & Troilo, P.C.
For Brownsville Public Utility Board
7550 West IH-10, Suite 800
San Antonio, Texas 78229-5815

OR2007-01521

Dear Mr. Garza:

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# 271177.

The Brownsville Public Utility Board (the "board"), which you represent, received a request for information relating to utility customers at a specified address during a particular time interval. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.133 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.¹

Section 552.133 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information held by a public power utility that is related to a competitive matter. *See* Gov't Code § 552.133(b). "Competitive matter" is defined as a matter that the public power utility governing body in good faith determines by vote to be related to the utility's competitive activity. *Id.* § 552.133(a)(3). The governing body also must determine, in like manner, that the release of the information would give an advantage to competitors or prospective competitors. *Id.* Section 552.133(a)(3) lists thirteen categories of information that may not be deemed to be competitive matters. The attorney general may conclude that section 552.133 is inapplicable to the information at issue only if, based on the information provided, the attorney general determines that the public power utility governing body has not acted in good faith in

¹This letter ruling assumes that the submitted sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the board to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

determining that the issue, matter, or activity is a competitive matter or that the information requested is not reasonably related to a competitive matter. *Id.* § 552.133(c). Moreover, section 552.133(b) provides as follows:

Information or records are excepted from [required public disclosure] 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.

Id. § 552.133(b). You inform us that the board, as the governing body of a public power utility, adopted a resolution by vote pursuant to section 552.133 in which it defined the submitted information to be within the scope of the term “competitive matter.” You have submitted a copy of that resolution. We note that the submitted information is not among the thirteen categories of information that section 552.133(a)(3) expressly excludes from the definition of competitive matter. Moreover, we have no evidence that the board failed to act in good faith. *See id.* § 552.133(c). Therefore, based on your representations, the board’s resolution, and our review of the submitted information, we conclude that the submitted information relates to a competitive matter in accordance with the resolution and is excepted from disclosure under section 552.133 of the Government Code. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your other arguments against disclosure.

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).

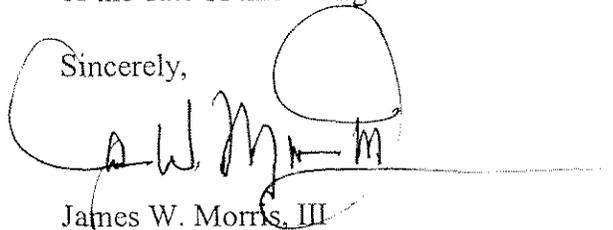
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III", written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and includes a large loop at the end.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/jww

Ref: ID# 271177

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Todd McFarland
c/o Frank J. Garza
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(w/o enclosures)