



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 18, 2007

Mr. Matthew Tepper
McCreary Veselka Bragg & Allen, P.C.
For Bell County Appraisal District
700 Jeffrey Way, Suite 100
Round Rock, Texas 78664-2425

OR2007-09101

Dear Mr. Tepper:

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# 284177.

The Bell County Appraisal District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for twelve categories of information contained in the district's appraisal data files. You state that the district will release a portion of the responsive information. We understand you to claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.110, and 552.148 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You claim that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.148 of the Government Code.¹ Section 552.148 provides in relevant part, "[i]nformation relating to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information received from a private entity by the comptroller or the chief appraiser of an appraisal district under Chapter 6, Tax Code, is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021." Gov't Code § 552.148(a). You state that some of the submitted information consists of real property sales information obtained from Multiple Listing Services, private appraisers, and realtors. You do not inform us that the district is authorized to release this information to the requestor. *See id.* § 552.148(b) (providing property owner or owner's agent access to certain information). Based on your representations and our

¹Act of May 21, 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., H.B. 2188 (to be codified at Gov't Code § 552.148) (effective immediately).

review of the information at issue, we find that the district must withhold this information under section 552.148 of the Government Code.²

Next, section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. You contend that the remaining submitted information is confidential under section 22.27 of the Tax Code. This section states in pertinent part:

(a) Rendition statements, real and personal property reports, attachments to those statements and reports, and other information the owner of property provides to the appraisal office in connection with the appraisal of the property, including income and expense information related to a property filed with an appraisal office and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office or the comptroller about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential, are confidential and not open to public inspection. The statements and reports and the information they contain about specific real or personal property or a specific real or personal property owner and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential may not be disclosed to anyone other than an employee of the appraisal office who appraises property except as authorized by Subsection (b) of this section.

Tax Code § 22.27(a). You state that the remaining submitted information was obtained from property owners in connection with the appraisal of their property. You also state that the district assured these property owners that the information would be kept confidential. Therefore, this information is confidential under section 22.27(a) and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

In summary, the real property sales information obtained from Multiple Listing Services, private appraisers, and realtors must be withheld pursuant to section 552.148 of the Government Code. The remaining submitted information, which was obtained from property owners in connection with the appraisal of their property, is confidential under section 22.27 of the Tax Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

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.

²As our ruling is dispositive for this information, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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,



M. Alan Akin
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAA/jb

Ref: ID# 284177

Enc. Submitted documents

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(w/o enclosures)