



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 28, 2007

Mr. Preston Stone  
Sheets & Crossfield, P.C.  
309 East Main Street  
Round Rock, Texas 78664-5246

OR2007-11147

Dear Mr. Stone:

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# 287876.

The City of Hutto (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to city interactions with Williamson County regarding landfill expansion and information pertaining to municipal use of the landfill property. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.104, 552.105, 552.107, and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim. We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.301 of the Government Code prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Under section 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, and a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A), (D). You represent that the city received the request at issue on June 8, 2007; however, as of the date of this ruling you have not submitted arguments explaining why the stated exceptions apply or a copy of the specific information requested

or representative samples of it. Thus, the city has failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential under other law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Because the city has failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the city has waived sections 552.104, 552.105, and 552.107 of the Government Code, which are discretionary exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for a decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 630 at 4-5 (1994) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.107), 592 (1991) (governmental body may waive statutory predecessor to section 552.104), 564 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.105 subject to waiver). Further, although the city also raises sections 552.101 and 552.137 of the Government Code, which are mandatory exceptions to disclosure that may not be waived, the city has not submitted any information for our review. Therefore, we have no basis for finding any information confidential. Thus, we have no choice but to order the city to release the requested information. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge the ruling in court as outlined below.

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

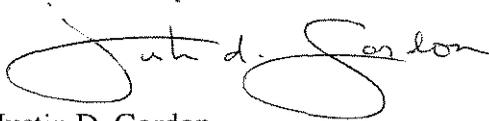
will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to 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 that reads "Justin D. Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Justin D. Gordon  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JDG/jh

Ref: ID# 287876

c: Ms. Sheila Fox  
Lowerre & Frederick  
44 East Avenue, Suite 100  
Austin, Texas 78701