



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

December 12, 2007

Mr. David B. McCall
Gay, McCall, Isaaks, Gordon & Roberts
For Plano Economic Development Board, Inc.
777 East 15th Street
Plano, Texas 75074

OR2007-16399

Dear Mr. McCall:

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# 297030.

The Plano Economic Development Board, Incorporated (the "board"), which you represent, received two separate requests for the board's agendas and meeting minutes during a specified period. You contend that the board is not a "governmental body" subject to the Act. We have considered your claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that the board is not a governmental body, and therefore its records are not subject to the Act. Under the Act, the term "governmental body" includes several enumerated kinds of entities and "the part, section, or portion of an organization, corporation, commission, committee, institution, or agency that spends or that is supported in whole or in part by public funds[.]" Gov't Code § 552.003(1)(A)(xii). The phrase "public funds" means funds of the state or of a governmental subdivision of the state. *Id.* § 552.003(5).

Both the courts and this office previously have considered the scope of the definition of "governmental body" under the Act and its statutory predecessor. In *Kneeland v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*, 850 F.2d 224 (5th Cir. 1988), the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit recognized that opinions of this office do not declare private persons or businesses to be "governmental bodies" that are subject to the Act "simply because [the persons or businesses] provide specific goods or services under a contract with a government body." *Kneeland*, 850 F.2d at 228; see Open Records Decision No. 1 (1973). Rather, the *Kneeland* court noted that in interpreting the predecessor to section 552.003 of the Government Code, this office's opinions generally examine the facts of the relationship between the private entity and the governmental body and apply three distinct patterns of analysis:

The opinions advise that an entity receiving public funds becomes a governmental body under the Act, unless its relationship with the government imposes “a specific and definite obligation . . . to provide a measurable amount of service in exchange for a certain amount of money as would be expected in a typical arms-length contract for services between a vendor and purchaser.” Tex. Att’y Gen. No. JM-821 (1987), quoting ORD-228 (1979). That same opinion informs that “a contract or relationship that involves public funds and that indicates a common purpose or objective or that creates an agency-type relationship between a private entity and a public entity will bring the private entity within the . . . definition of a ‘governmental body.’” Finally, that opinion, citing others, advises that some entities, such as volunteer fire departments, will be considered governmental bodies if they provide “services traditionally provided by governmental bodies.”

Kneeland, 850 F.2d at 228. The *Kneeland* court ultimately concluded that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (the “NCAA”) and the Southwest Conference (the “SWC”), both of which received public funds, were not “governmental bodies” for purposes of the Act because both provided specific, measurable services in return for those funds. *See id.*, 850 F.2d at 230-31. Both the NCAA and the SWC were associations made up of both private and public universities. Both the NCAA and the SWC received dues and other revenues from their member institutions. *Id.* at 226-28. In return for those funds, the NCAA and the SWC provided specific services to their members, such as supporting various NCAA and SWC committees; producing publications, television messages, and statistics; and investigating complaints of violations of NCAA and SWC rules and regulations. *Id.* at 229-31. The *Kneeland* court concluded that although the NCAA and the SWC received public funds from some of their members, neither entity was a “governmental body” for purposes of the Act, because the NCAA and SWC did not receive the funds for their general support. Rather, the NCAA and the SWC provided “specific and gaugeable services” in return for the funds that they received from their member public institutions. *See id.* at 231; *see also A.H. Belo Corp. v. S. Methodist Univ.*, 734 S.W.2d 720 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1987, writ denied) (athletic departments of private-school members of SWC did not receive or spend public funds and thus were not governmental bodies for purposes of Act).

In exploring the scope of the definition of “governmental body” under the Act, this office has distinguished between private entities that receive public funds in return for specific, measurable services and those entities that receive public funds as general support. In Open Records Decision No. 228 (1979), we considered whether the North Texas Commission (the “commission”), a private, nonprofit corporation chartered for the purpose of promoting the interests of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, was a governmental body. *See* ORD 288 at 1. The commission’s contract with the City of Fort Worth obligated the city to pay the commission \$80,000 per year for three years. *Id.* The contract obligated the commission, among other things, to “[c]ontinue its current successful programs and implement such new and innovative programs as will further its corporate objectives and common City’s interests and activities.” *Id.* at 2. Noting this provision, this office stated that “[e]ven if all other parts of the contract were found to represent a strictly arms-length

transaction, we believe that this provision places the various governmental bodies which have entered into the contract in the position of 'supporting' the operation of the Commission with public funds within the meaning of [the predecessor to section 552.003]." *Id.* Accordingly, the commission was determined to be a governmental body for purposes of the Act. *Id.*

In Open Records Decision No. 602 (1992), we addressed the status of the Dallas Museum of Art (the "DMA") under the Act. The DMA was a private, nonprofit corporation that had contracted with the City of Dallas to care for and preserve an art collection owned by the city and to maintain, operate, and manage an art museum. *See* Open Records Decision No. 602 at 1-2. The contract required the city to support the DMA by maintaining the museum building, paying for utility service, and providing funds for other costs of operating the museum. *Id.* at 2. We noted that an entity that receives public funds is a governmental body under the Act, unless the entity's relationship with the governmental body from which it receives funds imposes "a specific and definite obligation . . . to provide a measurable amount of service in exchange for a certain amount of money as would be expected in a typical arms-length contract for services between a vendor and purchaser." *Id.* at 4. We found that "the [City of Dallas] is receiving valuable services in exchange for its obligations, but, in our opinion, the very nature of the services the DMA provides to the [City of Dallas] cannot be known, specific, or measurable." *Id.* at 5. Thus, we concluded that the City of Dallas provided general support to the DMA facilities and operation, making the DMA a governmental body to the extent that it received the city's financial support. *Id.* Therefore, the DMA's records that related to programs supported by public funds were subject to the Act. *Id.*

In the present case, you inform us that board is a non-profit, Texas corporation that has contracted with the City of Plano (the "city") to promote development. You explain that the board does not receive unrestricted grants for its general support, but instead performs known, measurable services for the funds it receives. You have provided a copy of the agreement between the board and the city that sets forth the services that the board will provide in consideration for a sum of money. You also state that the board was organized to promote and develop business expansion, redevelopment, attraction and retention within the city limits.

After reviewing the submitted contract, we note, although the contract imposes an obligation on the board to provide certain specific services in exchange for a certain amount of money, the contract also contains several provisions that obligates the board to market and promote the city as an advantageous location for businesses. As in Open Records Decision No. 228 where we construed a similar contractual provision, we believe these provisions place the governmental body with which the board contracts in the position of "supporting" the operation of the board with public funds within the meaning of section 552.003 of the Government Code. *See* ORD 228 at 2.

We additionally note that the precise manner of public funding is not the sole dispositive issue in determining whether a particular entity is subject to the Act. *See* Attorney General

Opinion JM-821 at 3 (1987). Other aspects of a contract or relationship that involve the transfer of public funds between a private and a public entity must be considered in determining whether the private entity is a “governmental body” under the Act. *Id.* at 4. For example, a contract or relationship that involves public funds, and that indicates a common purpose or objective or that creates an agency-type relationship between a private entity and a public entity, will bring the private entity within the definition of a “governmental body” under section 552.003(1)(A)(xii) of the Government Code. The overall nature of the relationship created by the contract is relevant in determining whether the private entity is so closely associated with the governmental body that the private entity falls within the Act. *Id.*

In this case, based upon our review of the submitted contract, we conclude that the board and the city with which it contracts share a common purpose and objective. *See* Open Records Decision No. 621 at 9 (1993); *see also* Local Gov’t Code § 380.001(a), (b) (providing that governing body of municipality may establish and provide for administration of one or more programs, including programs for making loans and grants of public money and providing personnel and services of the municipality, to promote state or local economic development and to stimulate business and commercial activity in the municipality). Further, we find that the services the board provides pursuant to the contract comprise of traditional governmental functions. *See* ORD 621 at 7 n.10. Accordingly, we conclude that the board falls within the definition of a “governmental body” under section 552.003(1)(A)(xii) of the Government Code with respect to the services it performs under the contract at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 602 at 5 (1992). Information relating to the economic development activities the board performs on behalf of the governmental body it promotes is, therefore, subject to the Act. Thus, we determine that, in this case, the information requested is subject to disclosure under the Act. As you raise no exception to the required public disclosure of the information in the submitted records, the board must release this information to the requestor.

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 file suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such a challenge, 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 challenge 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,



Henisha D. Anderson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

HDA/jb

Ref: ID# 297030

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jack Lagos
c/o Mr. David B. McCall
777 East 15th Street
Plano, Texas 75074
(w/o enclosures)