



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

April 16, 2008

Mr. John Danner
Assistant City Attorney
City of San Antonio
P.O. Box 839966
San Antonio, Texas 78283

OR2008-05087

Dear Mr. Danner:

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# 307913.

The City of San Antonio (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to the city's Financial Underwriting Services Syndicate Selection Committee during a specified time period. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.137 of the Government Code.¹ Additionally, you claim that portions of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of a third party, Popular Securities. Pursuant to section 552.305, you state, and provide documentation showing, that you notified Popular Securities of the request and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information should not be released. *See Gov't Code* § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under the Act in certain circumstances). We have considered the exception the city claims and reviewed the submitted information.

¹As you have submitted no arguments in support of your initial assertion of sections 552.104, 552.105, 552.110, 552.128, 552.131, and 552.139 of the Government Code, we will not address the applicability of any of those exceptions. *See Gov't Code* §§ 552.301(e)(1)(A), .302.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why requested information relating to it should be withheld from disclosure. See Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, Popular Securities has not submitted to this office any reasons explaining why the requested information should not be released. We thus have no basis for concluding that any portion of the submitted information constitutes proprietary information of Popular Securities, and the city may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on that basis. See Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3 (1990).

You assert that the submitted information contains e-mail addresses that are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 makes certain e-mail addresses confidential, providing the following:

(a) Except as otherwise provided by this section, an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.

(b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release.

(c) Subsection (a) does not apply to an e-mail address:

(1) provided to a governmental body by a person who has a contractual relationship with the governmental body or by the contractor's agent;

(2) provided to a governmental body by a vendor who seeks to contract with the governmental body or by the vendor's agent;

(3) contained in a response to a request for bids or proposals, contained in a response to similar invitations soliciting offers or information relating to a potential contract, or provided to a governmental body in the course of negotiating the terms of a contract or potential contract; or

(4) provided to a governmental body on a letterhead, coversheet, printed document, or other document made available to the public.

(d) Subsection (a) does not prevent a governmental body from disclosing an e-mail address for any reason to another governmental body or to a federal agency.

Gov't Code § 552.137. Under section 552.137, a governmental body must withhold the e-mail address of a member of the general public, unless the individual to whom the e-mail address belongs has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. *See id.* § 552.137 (b). The types of e-mail addresses listed in section 552.137 (c) may not be withheld under section 552.137. Likewise, this section is not applicable to an institutional e-mail address, an Internet website address, or an e-mail address that a governmental entity maintains for one of its officials or employees. Therefore, the city must withhold any personal e-mail addresses under section 552.137, unless the owner of a particular e-mail address has affirmatively consented to its public disclosure. However, to the extent that any of the personal e-mail addresses belong to employees of entities with which the city has contractual relationships, or fall under any of the other exceptions listed under subsection 552.137(c), the e-mail addresses may not be withheld under section 552.137.

In summary, to the extent that the e-mail addresses contained in the submitted information are not excluded by subsection (c), they must be withheld under section 552.137 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

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,



Paige Savoie
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PS/ma

Ref: ID# 307913

Enc. Submitted documents

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