



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 13, 2008

Ms. Sharon Alexander  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11th Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2008-15620

Dear Ms. Alexander:

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# 328014.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the latest appraisals used in the property acquisition for two specified projects, to include seventeen identified parcels. You state the department has provided most of the requested information to the requestor. You claim the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.105 and 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.3. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information consists of completed appraisal reports that are subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(1) provides for the required public disclosure of "a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body," unless the information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). Sections 552.105 and 552.111 are discretionary exceptions under the Act and do not constitute "other law" for purposes of section 552.022. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 677 at 10 (2002) (attorney work product privilege under section 552.111 may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (discretionary exceptions generally), 564 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.105 subject to waiver), 470 at 7 (1987) (statutory predecessor to

section 552.111 may be waived). Thus, the submitted information may not be withheld under either section 552.105 or section 552.111 of the Government Code.

You also contend, however, the submitted information is protected by the consulting expert privilege found in rule 192.3(e) of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. The Texas Supreme Court has held “[t]he Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and Texas Rules of Evidence are ‘other law’ within the meaning of section 552.022.” *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001). A party to litigation is not required to disclose the identity, mental impressions, and opinions of consulting experts whose mental impressions or opinions have not been reviewed by a testifying expert. *See* TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.3(e). A “consulting expert” is defined as “an expert who has been consulted, retained, or specially employed by a party in anticipation of litigation or in preparation for trial, but who is not a testifying expert.” TEX. R. CIV. P. 192.7.

You inform us, when acquiring land, the department obtains expert advice from licensed appraisers in preparation for possible eminent domain litigation. You assert these appraisers are thus experts consulted in anticipation of litigation. You also state, at this time, the department does not anticipate calling the experts who prepared the submitted reports as trial witnesses. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the department may withhold the submitted information under Texas Rule of Civil Procedure 192.3(e).

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). If the governmental body does not file suit over 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,

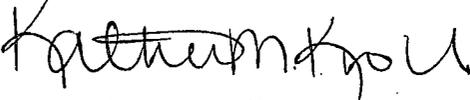
toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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,



Katherine M. Kroll  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KMK/eeg

Ref: ID# 328014

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jurgen Sass  
Lone Star Appraisals & Realty, Inc.  
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Cedar Park, Texas 78613  
(w/o enclosures)