



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 27, 2009

Mr. B. Chase Griffith
Brown & Hofmeister, L.L.P.
740 East Campbell Road, Suite 800
Richardson, Texas 75081

OR2009-02588

Dear Mr. Griffith:

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# 335949 (Flower Mound PIR # 655-08).

The Town of Flower Mound (the "town"), which you represent, received a request for information relating to complaints or code violations pertaining to a specified address from July 2008 through the date of the request. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted documents pertain to a pending investigation being conducted by the town's Code Enforcement Department (the "department"). You inform this office that the department enforces section 34-71 of the town's Code of Ordinances. Based on this representation and our review, we find the department to be a law enforcement agency for the purposes of section 552.108. Furthermore, you state that the information at issue concerns alleged violations of section 34-71 which is punishable by a criminal penalty. Accordingly, we conclude that the release of this information would interfere with the

detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases). Thus, the information at issue is subject to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

We note, however, that the submitted information includes a notice of violation. Because a copy of a notice of violation was provided to the individual who was in violation of the town code, we find that release of the submitted notice of violation will not interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Gov't Code* § 552.108(a)(1). We therefore conclude that the notice of violation that we have marked may not be withheld under section 552.108(a)(1).

We also note that basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.108. *Id.* § 552.108(c). Such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*, and includes, among other things, the identification and description of the complainant. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). The submitted information contains the identity of a complainant that would generally be subject to release as basic information. You contend, however, that the identity of the complainant is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." *Gov't Code* § 552.101. The informer's privilege, incorporated into the Act by section 552.101, has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928). It protects from disclosure the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided that the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1988), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The informer's privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing Wigmore, *Evidence*, § 2374, at 767 (McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must be of a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5 (1988).

As previously stated, you inform us the submitted information contains identifying information of a complainant who reported possible violations of section 34-71 of the town's Code of Ordinances, a violation of which you inform us may result in a criminal penalty.

Having examined these provisions, your arguments, and the documents at issue, we conclude that the town may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 in conjunction with the informer's privilege.

In summary, with the exception of the marked notice of violation and basic information, the town may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. In releasing basic information from the submitted information, the town may withhold the identifying information of the complainant, which we have marked, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,



Laura E. Ream
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

LER/jb

Ref: ID# 335949

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)