



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 29, 2013

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

OR2013-12990

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# 494673.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received two requests for the letters of interest for the firms that were awarded contracts for a specified solicitation number. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.104 of the Government Code. Additionally, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of several third parties. Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified the third parties of the requests for information and of their rights to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released.¹ *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received correspondence from Baseline, CobbFendley, CRIADO, and Landtech. We have reviewed the submitted arguments and the submitted information.

¹The third parties notified were Baseline Corporation ("Baseline"); CobbFendley & Associates, Inc. ("CobbFendley"); CRIADO & Associates, Inc. ("CRIADO"); Lamb-Star Engineering, L.P.; Landtech Consultants, Inc. ("Landtech"); Lina T. Ramey & Associates, Inc.; Pacheco Koch Consulting Engineers, Inc.; Surveying and Mapping, Inc.; SURVCON; and TranSystems Corporation Consultants.

Initially, the department states the submitted information was the subject of a previous request for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2013-05430 (2013). In that ruling, we held the department may withhold the information at issue under section 552.104 of the Government Code. However, as the department acknowledges, the circumstances have changed because a contract has now been awarded. Therefore, the department may not rely on Open Records Letter No. 2013-05430 as a previous determination. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure). Accordingly, we will address the submitted arguments against the disclosure of the information at issue.

Section 552.104 of the Government Code excepts from required public disclosure “information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder.” Gov’t Code § 552.104. The purpose of section 552.104 is to protect the purchasing interests of a governmental body in competitive bidding situations where the governmental body wishes to withhold information in order to obtain more favorable offers. *See* Open Records Decision No. 592 (1991) (discussing statutory predecessor). Section 552.104 protects information from disclosure if the governmental body demonstrates potential harm to its interests in a particular competitive situation. *See* Open Records Decision No. 463 (1987). Generally, section 552.104 does not except information from disclosure after bidding is completed and the contract has been executed. *See* Open Records Decision No. 541 (1990). However, in Open Records Decision No. 541, this office stated the predecessor to section 552.104 may protect information after bidding is complete if the governmental body demonstrates public disclosure of the information will allow competitors to undercut future bids, and the governmental body solicits bids for the same or similar goods or services on a recurring basis. *See id.* at 5 (recognizing limited situation in which statutory predecessor to section 552.104 continued to protect information submitted by successful bidder when disclosure would allow competitors to accurately estimate and undercut future bids); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 309 (1982) (suggesting that such principle will apply when governmental body solicits bids for same or similar goods or services on recurring basis).

In this instance, you explain the department “solicits letters of interests and has competitive procurements for this type of contract on a recurring basis.” You argue that release of the information at issue “would adversely impact [the department’s] negotiation of future contracts by placing vendors at a competitive advantage.” Based on your representations, we find you have demonstrated public release of the submitted information would cause specific harm to the department’s interests in particular competitive situations. Therefore, the department may withhold the submitted information under section 552.104 of the Government Code. As we make this determination, we do not address the remaining arguments.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Sarah Casterline
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SEC/tch

Ref: ID# 494673

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Two Requestors
(w/o enclosures)

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