



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 21, 2013

Mr. E. Barry Gaines
Legal Counsel
Harris County Appraisal District
P.O. Box 920975
Houston, Texas 77292-0975

OR2013-18290

Dear Mr. Gaines:

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# 502951 (HCAD Ref. No. 13-3260).

The Harris County Appraisal District (the "district") received a request for four categories of information pertaining to a specified account number. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim.

We must address the district's obligations under the Act. Section 552.301 of the Government Code describes the procedural obligations placed on a governmental body that receives a written request for information it wishes to withhold. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301. Pursuant to section 552.301(e) of the Government Code, a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving the request (1) written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *See id.* § 552.301(e). You inform us the district received the request on July 29, 2013. Accordingly, the district's fifteen-business-day deadline was August 19, 2013. However, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the district failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the requested information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-81 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). A compelling reason exists when third-party interests are at stake or when information is confidential under other law. Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977). Because the district has failed to comply with the requirements of the Act, the district has waived its argument under section 552.103 of the Government Code, which is a discretionary exception that does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Gov't Code* § 552.007; *Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general). Furthermore, because you have not submitted the requested information to this office for our review, we have no basis for finding it confidential under other law. Thus, we have no choice but to order you to release the requested information in accordance with section 552.302 of the Government Code.

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,



Kathryn R. Mattingly
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KRM/tch

Ref: ID# 502951

c: Requestor