



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 19, 2013

Mr. Michael B. Gary
Chief Legal Officer
Harris County Appraisal District
P.O. Box 920975
Houston, Texas 77292-0975

OR2013-20155

Dear Mr. Gary:

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# 506194 (HCAD No. 13-3582).

The Harris County Appraisal District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified account. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 22.27 of the Tax Code provides the following:

- (a) Rendition statements, real and personal property reports, attachments to those statements and reports, and other information the owner of property provides to the appraisal office in connection with the appraisal of the property, including income and expense information related to a property filed with an appraisal office and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office or the comptroller about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential, are confidential and not open to public inspection. The statements and reports and the information they

contain about specific real or personal property or a specific real or personal property owner and information voluntarily disclosed to an appraisal office about real or personal property sales prices after a promise it will be held confidential may not be disclosed to anyone other than an employee of the appraisal office who appraises property except as authorized by Subsection (b) of this section.

(b) Information made confidential by this section may be disclosed:

...

(2) to the person who filed the statement or report or the owner of property subject to the statement, report, or information or to a representative of either authorized in writing to receive the information[.]

Tax Code § 22.27(a), (b)(2). We understand the district is an “appraisal office” for purposes of section 22.27(a). You state the submitted information consists of confidential information provided to the district by a property owner in connection with the appraisal of their property under promises of confidentiality. *See id.* § 22.27(a). However, we note the requestor may be the authorized representative of the owner of the account at issue and, therefore, may have a right of access to the submitted information that would otherwise be confidential under section 22.27. *See id.* § 22.27(b)(2). Thus, we find, if the requestor does not provide the requisite written authorization under section 22.27(b)(2), then the district must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 22.27(a) of the Tax Code. However, if the requestor provides the requisite written authorization pursuant to section 22.27(b)(2) of the Tax Code, the district may not withhold the submitted information from this requestor under section 552.101 on that basis, and the district must release the submitted information to the requestor.

Section 552.130 excepts from disclosure information that relates to a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state or another state or country. Gov’t Code § 552.130(a)(2). We note section 552.130 protects personal privacy. In the event the requestor is the authorized representative of the property owner at issue, she also has a special right of access to the motor vehicle information of the owner she represents pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.023(a) (person or person’s authorized representative has special right of access, beyond the right of general public, to information held by governmental body that relates to person and is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect person’s privacy interests); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987). Therefore, the district may not withhold any of the information at issue under section 552.130 of the Government Code.

In summary, if the requestor does not provide the requisite written authorization under section 22.27(b)(2), then the district must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 22.27(a) of the Tax Code. If the requestor provides the requisite written authorization pursuant to section 22.27(b)(2) of the Tax Code, the district must release the submitted information to the requestor.

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,



Megan G. Holloway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MGH/tch

Ref: ID# 506194

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)