



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 27, 2014

Ms. Cathy Cunningham
Boyle & Lowry, L.L.P.
4201 Wingren Drive, Suite 108
Irving, Texas 75062-2763

OR2014-01520

Dear Ms. Cunningham:

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# 512089.

The Town of Westlake (the "town"), which you represent, received a request for correspondence between the town and its officials, the Trophy Club Municipal Utility District No. 1 (the "district"), and a specified business, relating to district services in the town, during a specified time period. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information that comes within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* ORD 676 at 6-7. First, a governmental body must demonstrate the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the

¹ Although you also raise section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Texas Rule of Evidence 503, this office has concluded section 552.101 does not encompass discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 676 at 1-2 (2002), 575 at 2 (1990). Further, although you raise Texas Rule of Evidence 503, we note the proper exceptions to raise when asserting the attorney-client privilege in this instance is section 552.107 of the Government Code. *See* ORD 676 at 1-2.

rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *See In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, lawyer representatives, and a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.*, meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *See Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You claim the submitted information is protected by section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. You state the information at issue consists of communications involving the attorneys for the town and town employees and officials in their capacities as clients. You state the communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the town and you state these communications have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. Thus, the town may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, some of these e-mail strings include e-mails received from or sent to parties whom you have not identified and have not demonstrated are privileged parties. Furthermore, if the e-mails received from or sent to non-privileged parties are removed from the e-mail strings and stand alone, they are responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if these non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, are maintained by the town separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail strings in which they appear, then the town may not withhold them under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code and they must be released.

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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/som

Ref: ID# 512089

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

