



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 2, 2014

Mr. Larry R. Pannell
City Administrator
City of Electra
101 North Main
Electra, Texas 76360-2699

OR2014-09384

Dear Mr. Pannell:

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# 524416.

The City of Electra (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to the former city chief of police, including all complaints and rebuttals made by citizens, city employees, former city police officers, and other law enforcement entities; all complaints regarding seven named city employees; and all correspondence from or to two named city commissioners. You claim the submitted information is not subject to the Act. We have considered the submitted argument and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we address the city's contention the submitted audio recording is not subject to the Act. The Act is applicable only to "public information." *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.002, .021. Section 552.002(a) defines "public information" as information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body;
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:

(A) owns the information;

(B) has a right of access to the information; or

(C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information; or

(3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Id. § 552.002. Thus, virtually all the information in a governmental body's physical possession constitutes public information and is subject to the Act. *See id.* § 552.002(a)(1); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 549 at 4 (1990), 514 at 1-2 (1988). We note the request seeks, among other things, all complaints against the former city police chief made by city employees. Upon review of the information at issue, we find it pertains to such a complaint. Thus, we conclude the city maintains the information at issue in connection with the transaction of its official business. Accordingly, this information is subject to the Act and must be released, unless the information falls within an exception to disclosure under the Act. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .021, .301, .302.

Next, we note you only submitted an audio recording concerning the former city chief of police. We assume, to the extent any information responsive to the remainder of the request existed on the date the city received the request, the city has released it. If the city has not released any such information, it must do so at this time. *See id.* §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

We must address the city's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). The city received the request for information on March 4, 2014. You do not inform us the city was closed for any business days between March 4, 2014, and March 18, 2014. Accordingly, you were required to provide the information required by subsection 552.301(b) by March 18, 2014. However, the envelope in which the city provided the information required by subsection 552.301(b) was postmarked March 24, 2014. *See id.* § 552.308(a)(1) (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Accordingly, we conclude the city failed to comply with the procedural requirements mandated by 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 there is a compelling reason to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a governmental body may demonstrate a compelling reason to withhold information by showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests. *See* ORD 630. We note section 552.117 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to overcome this presumption.¹ Therefore, we will address the applicability of section 552.117 to the submitted information.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee or official of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus, information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee or official who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee or official who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. Therefore, if the individuals whose information is at issue timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code, the city must withhold the information we have noted in the submitted audio recording under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. Conversely, if the individuals at issue did not timely request confidentiality under section 552.024, the city may not withhold the noted information under section 552.117(a)(1). The city must release the remaining information.

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/>

¹The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

[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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. A. Ybarra". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and a stylized "Ybarra".

Nicholas A. Ybarra
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

NAY/bhf

Ref: ID# 524416

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)