



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 3, 2014

Ms. Catelyn H. Kostbar
Administrative Technician III
Harris County Appraisal District
P.O. Box 920975
Houston, Texas 77292-0975

OR2014-19839

Dear Ms. Kostbar:

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# 543021 (HCAD Ref. No. 14-3352).

The Harris County Appraisal District (the "district") received a request for the "Housebill 201 Evidence packet" related to a specified protest hearing. The district states it will provide some of the requested information to the requestor, but claims some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.149 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Section 552.149 of the Government Code provides, in relevant part, the following:

- (a) Information relating to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information received from a private entity by the comptroller or the chief appraiser of an appraisal district under Chapter 6, Tax Code, is excepted from the requirements of [the Act].

¹You acknowledge, and we agree, the district did not comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b), (e). Nevertheless, section 552.149 of the Government Code is a mandatory exception that can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness caused by a failure to comply with section 552.301. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302. Thus, we will consider the district's claim.

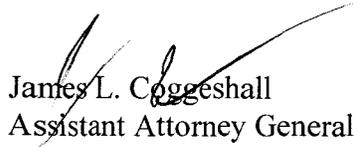
(b) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), the property owner or the owner's agent may, on request, obtain from the chief appraiser of the applicable appraisal district a copy of each item of information described by Section 41.461(a)(2), Tax Code, and a copy of each item of information that the chief appraiser took into consideration but does not plan to introduce at the hearing on the protest. In addition, the property owner or agent may, on request, obtain from the chief appraiser comparable sales data from a reasonable number of sales that is relevant to any matter to be determined by the appraisal review board at the hearing on the property owner's protest[.]

Gov't Code § 552.149(a)-(b). Subsections 552.149(a) and (b) are limited to those counties having a population of 50,000 or more. *Id.* § 552.149(e). We note Harris County has a population of 50,000 or more. You indicate the submitted information that you have marked was obtained from private entities and relates to real property sales prices, descriptions, characteristics, and other related information that was provided to the district by a private entity. Therefore, this information is generally confidential under section 552.149(a) of the Government Code. However, pursuant to section 552.149(b) of the Government Code, a property owner or the owner's designated agent has a right of access to certain information that is confidential under section 552.149(a). You represent a protest was filed regarding property that the requestor may own. Thus, the requestor may have a right of access to certain information about that property under section 552.149(b). As stated above, subsection (b) provides a property owner or the owner's agent a right of access to information described by section 41.461(a)(2) of the Tax Code, information the chief appraiser took into consideration during the appraisal but does not plan to introduce at the hearing on the protest, and comparable sales data from a reasonable number of sales that is relevant to the matter to be determined by the appraisal board. *See id.* § 552.149(b). Accordingly, if the requestor is the owner or the agent of the owner of the property at issue, then the district must release each item of information described by section 41.461(a)(2) of the Tax Code, a copy of each item of information that the chief appraiser took into consideration but does not plan to introduce at the hearing on the protest, and comparable sales data from a reasonable number of sales that is relevant to any matter to be determined by the appraisal review board at the hearing on the property owner's protest, but must withhold any remaining marked information that was provided by private entities under section 552.149(a) of the Government Code. However, if the requestor is not an owner or an agent of an owner of the property at issue, then the district must withhold the marked information that was provided to the district by private entities under section 552.149(a) of the Government Code. The district 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/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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/cbz

Ref: ID# 543021

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)