



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

September 29, 2015

Mr. Philip S. Haag
General Counsel for the Johnson Ranch Municipal Utility District
McGinnis Lochridge, L.L.P.
600 Congress Avenue, Suite 2100
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2015-20378

Dear Mr. Haag:

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# 581076.

The Johnson Ranch Municipal Utility District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for three categories of information pertaining to specified properties. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹ We have also received and considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit written comments regarding why information should or should not be released).

Initially, we note some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Id. § 552.022(a)(1). Some of the submitted information, which we have marked, consists of completed reports that are subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1). The district must release the information at issue pursuant to subsection 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly made confidential under the Act or other law. Although you raise section 552.103 of the Government Code for this information, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure and does not make information confidential under the Act. *See 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 Gov't Code § 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, none of the information subject to section 552.022(a)(1) may be withheld under section 552.103.

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Id. § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, orig. proceeding); *Heard v.*

Houston Post Co., 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

You contend the submitted information not subject to section 552.022 is related to active litigation to which the district is a party. You inform us, and have provided documentation demonstrating, litigation styled *Johnson Ranch Municipal Utility District v. Graham*, Cause No. 2015-CVB-0054, and *Johnson Ranch Municipal Utility District v. Margie Hastings, et al*, Cause No. 2015-CVB-0056, was pending in the County Court at Law of Comal County at the time the district received the instant request. You also state litigation styled *Johnson Ranch Municipal Utility District v. Patricia Lux Graham and Margie Hastings*, Cause No. C2014-0438B, was pending in the 207th Judicial District Court of Comal County at the time the district received the instant request. You state the information at issue is related to the active lawsuits. Based on your representations, the submitted documentation, and our review of the submitted information, we find the information at issue relates to litigation that was pending when the district received this request for information. Accordingly, we conclude the district may withhold the submitted information not subject to section 552.022(a)(1) under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing parties in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

We note some of the remaining information appears to be protected by copyright. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Open Records Decision No. 180 at 3 (1977). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.*; see Open Records Decision No. 109 (1975). If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit.

In summary, the district may withhold the submitted information not subject to section 552.022(a)(1) under section 552.103 of the Government Code. The district must release the remaining information; however, any information subject to copyright may only be released in accordance with copyright law.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meredith L. Coffman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Meredith L. Coffman
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MLC/dls

Ref: ID# 581076

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)