



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 2, 2015

Ms. Sarah Parker
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2015-25149

Dear Ms. Parker:

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# 588853.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the winning bidders' responses to RFP-57-5RFPSG001. Although the department takes no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, it states release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of CB&I Environmental & Infrastructure; Kleinfelder, Inc.; Terracon Consultants, Inc.; Tetra Tech, Inc. ("Tetra Tech"); and TRC Environmental Corporation. Accordingly, the department states, and provides documentation showing, it notified the third parties of the request for information and of their rights to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have received comments from Tetra Tech. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have only received comments from Tetra Tech explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude the remaining third parties have protected proprietary interests in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, release of requested information

would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish prima facie case information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the department may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interests the remaining third parties may have in the information.

Tetra Tech asserts some of its information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Section 552.110 protects (1) trade secrets and (2) commercial or financial information the disclosure of which would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(a)-(b). Section 552.110(a) protects trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of trade secret from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts, which holds a trade secret to be:

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives him an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business . . . in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. . . . It may . . . relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 776 (Tex. 1958). In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret as well as the Restatement's list of six trade secret factors.¹ Restatement of Torts § 757 cmt. b. This office

¹The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and other involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b; *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

must accept a claim information subject to the Act is excepted as a trade secret if a *prima facie* case for the exception is made and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. *See* ORD 552 at 5. However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) protects “[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.*; *see also* ORD 661 at 5.

Tetra Tech argues some of its information constitutes trade secrets under section 552.110(a). Upon review, we find Tetra Tech has established a *prima facie* case the customer information we have marked constitutes trade secret information for purposes of section 552.110(a). Accordingly, to the extent the customer information at issue is not publicly available on Tetra Tech’s website, the department must withhold the customer information we have marked under section 552.110(a). However, we find Tetra Tech has failed to establish a *prima facie* case any portion of its remaining information meets the definition of a trade secret, nor has it demonstrated the necessary factors to establish a trade secret claim for its remaining information. *See* ORD 402. Therefore, none of Tetra Tech’s remaining information may be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

Tetra Tech further argues portions of its remaining information consist of commercial information, the release of which would cause the company substantial competitive harm under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code. We note Tetra Tech was a winning bidder in this instance. This office considers the prices charged in government contract awards to be a matter of strong public interest; thus, the pricing information of a winning bidder is generally not excepted under section 552.110(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors). *See generally* Dep’t of Justice Guide to the Freedom of Information Act 344-345 (2009) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). Upon review, we find Tetra Tech has not established any of the remaining information constitutes commercial or financial information, the disclosure of which would cause the company substantial competitive harm. Accordingly, none of Tetra Tech’s remaining information may be withheld under section 552.110(b) of the Government Code.

In summary, to the extent the customer information at issue is not publicly available on Tetra Tech’s website, the department must withhold the customer information we have marked under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. The department 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,



Lee Seidlits
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CLS/som

Ref: ID# 588853

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Richard Box
Operations Manager
Tetra Tech, Inc.
2901 Wilcrest Drive, Suite 405
Houston, Texas 77042-6012
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Leigh Grover
CB&I Environmental & Infrastructure
12005 Ford Road, Suite 600
Dallas, Texas 75234
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Roxie L. Voran
Kleinfelder, Inc.
12000 Aerospace Avenue, Suite 450
Houston, Texas 77034
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Russell Ford
Terracon Consultants, Inc.
5307 Industrial Oaks Boulevard,
Suite 160
Austin, Texas 78735
(w/o enclosures)

TRC Environmental Corporation
700 Highlander Boulevard, Suite 210
Arlington, Texas 76015
(w/o enclosures)