



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 11, 2016

Ms. Diane K. McCarthy
Legal Counsel
Harris County Appraisal District
P.O. Box 920975
Houston, Texas 77292-0975

OR2016-03386

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

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# 598484 (ORR# 15-4144).

The Harris County Appraisal District (the "district") received a request for a list of accounts coded to Roberts Tax Appeal ("Roberts"). The district does not take a position as to whether the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under the Act. However, the district states, and provides documentation showing, it notified Roberts of the district's receipt of the request for information and of Roberts's right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 at 3 (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 reviewed the submitted information.¹

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 requested information relating to it should be withheld from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, Roberts has not submitted to this office any reasons explaining why the requested information should not be released. Thus, we have no basis for concluding the submitted information constitutes proprietary information of that third party, and the district may not withhold any portion of it on that basis.

¹We note the district did not comply with the requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301. Nevertheless, third-party interests 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 whether the submitted information must be withheld under the Act on the basis of third-party interests.

See 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, that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Therefore, the district must release the submitted information.²

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/bhf

Ref: ID# 598484

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Roberts Tax Appeal
P.O. Box 924196
Houston, Texas 77292
(w/o enclosures)

²We note section 552.136(c) of the Government Code permits a governmental body to withhold account numbers described in section 552.136(b) without the necessity of seeking a decision from this office. See Gov't Code § 552.136(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.136(e). See *id.* § 552.136(d), (e).