



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 9, 2016

Ms. Hadassah Schloss
Director, Open Government
Texas General Land Office
P.O. Box 12873
Austin, Texas 78711-2873

OR2016-10517

Dear Ms. Schloss:

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# 609548.

The Texas General Land Office (the "GLO") received a request for all information from the Houston Housing Authority (the "HHA") and Allen Parkway Venture pertaining to a specified project and disaster relief funds. You state you have released some information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note portions of the submitted information, which we have marked, are not responsive to the instant request because they were created after the GLO received the instant request. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request, and the GLO is not required to release such information in response to this request.

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]" Gov't Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process

and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, we determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351, 364 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152, 157 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, section 552.111 protects the factual information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document that is intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

Section 552.111 can also encompass communications between a governmental body and a third party, including a consultant or other party with a privity of interest. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 9 (1990) (section 552.111 encompasses communications with party with which governmental body has privity of interest or common deliberative process). For section 552.111 to apply, the governmental body must identify the third party and explain the nature of its relationship with the governmental body. Section 552.111 is not applicable to a communication between the governmental body and a third party unless the governmental body establishes it has a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the third party. *See* ORD 561.

You claim the responsive information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code because it consists of advice, opinions, and recommendations relating to the GLO's policymaking functions. You also claim some of the information in Attachment D consists of draft documents that will be released in their final form. You inform us Attachment C consists of communications between GLO personnel and HHA staff regarding the project specified in the request. Additionally, you explain the GLO "administers funds that the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") . . . allocates to the [s]tate[.]" Further, you state the HHA is required to submit documentation for the GLO's approval in order to receive funds from HUD. Based on your representations and our review, we find the you have demonstrated the internal communications between GLO employees, which we marked, consist of advice, opinions, or recommendations on the policymaking matters of the GLO. Accordingly, the GLO may withhold the information we have marked, which includes the draft documents in Attachment D, under section 552.111. However, the remaining responsive information either consists of communications between the GLO and the HHA in which it appears the GLO is acting in a regulatory capacity over the HHA, or does not consist of advice, opinions, or recommendations of the GLO regarding policymaking matters. Consequently, the GLO may not withhold the remaining responsive information under section 552.111. As you have not claimed any other exceptions to disclosure, the GLO must release the remaining responsive 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,



Cole Hutchison
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CH/akg

Ref: ID# 609548

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)