



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 22, 2016

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

OR2016-14106

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# 616425 (ORR# ROW16-0406).

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the appraisal performed on a specified piece of property. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.105 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.105 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to "appraisals or purchase price of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to the formal award of contracts for the property." Gov't Code § 552.105(2). Section 552.105 is designed to protect a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with respect to particular transactions. Open Records Decision Nos. 564 at 2 (1990), 357 (1982), 310 (1982). Information that is excepted from disclosure under section 552.105 that pertains to such negotiations may be excepted from disclosure so long as the transaction relating to that information is not complete. *See* ORD 310. But the protection offered by section 552.105 is not limited solely to transactions not yet finalized. This office has concluded that

¹We assume 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 those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

information about specific parcels of land obtained in advance of other parcels to be acquired for the same project could be withheld where release of the information would harm the governmental body's negotiating position with respect to the remaining parcels. *See* ORD 564 at 2. A governmental body may withhold information "which, if released, would impair or tend to impair [its] 'planning and negotiating position in regard to particular transactions.'" ORD 357 at 3 (quoting Open Records Decision No. 222 (1979)). The question of whether specific information, if publicly released, would impair a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with regard to particular transactions is a question of fact. Accordingly, this office will accept a governmental body's good-faith determination in this regard, unless the contrary is clearly shown as a matter of law. *See* ORD 564.

You state the department has made a good-faith determination that the information in Exhibit B relates to the appraisal or purchase price of real property the department intends to purchase. You explain the department still needs to purchase property in the area at issue, and release of this information would harm the department's negotiating position with respect to the acquisition of this nearby property. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the department may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.105 of the Government Code.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,



Claire V. Morris Sloan
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CVMS/dls

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of the submitted information.

Ref: ID# 616425

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)