

Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas
Informal Letter Ruling No. OR2017-20822
September 12, 2017

Mr. Jeffrey W. Giles
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

Dear Mr. Giles:

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# 674971 (GC No. 24407).

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for seven categories of information pertaining to the city's waste management services. You state the city does not have information responsive to portions of the request.¹ Additionally, you state the city will release some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under [sections 552.104, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code](#). We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.²

Initially, we note some of the submitted information may be the subject of a previous request for information, as a result of which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2017-06605 (2017). In that ruling, we determined the city may withhold the information at issue under [sections 552.104 and 552.107 of the Government Code](#). There is no indication the law, facts, and circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have changed. Accordingly, we conclude the city may continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2017-06605 as a previous determination and withhold the identical information in accordance with that ruling. See Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes information is or is not excepted from disclosure). To the extent the submitted information is not identical to the information at issue in Open Records Letter No. 2017-06605, we will address your arguments against its disclosure.

[Section 552.104\(a\) of the Government Code](#) excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." [Gov't Code § 552.104\(a\)](#). The "test under [section 552.104](#) is whether knowing another bidder's [or competitor's information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage." [Boeing Co. v. Paxton, 466 S.W.3d 831 \(Tex. 2015\)](#). We understand the information at issue pertains to a competitive bidding situation. You state the information pertains to an ongoing bidding process for which a final contract has not yet been awarded. You assert release of the information would harm the city's ability to obtain the lowest price possible by giving bidders a competitive advantage. After review of the information at issue and consideration of your arguments, we find the city has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the city may withhold Exhibit 2 under [section 552.104\(a\) of the Government Code](#).³

[Section 552.107\(1\)](#) protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. See Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. [TEX. R. EVID. 503\(b\)\(1\)](#). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. [TEX. R. EVID. 503\(b\)\(1\)\(A\), \(B\), \(C\), \(D\), \(E\)](#). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.* [503\(b\)\(1\)](#), meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit the communication.” *Id.* [503\(a\)\(5\)](#). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. See *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. [Section 552.107\(1\)](#) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. See *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state the information at issue consists of communications between city attorneys and employees that were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the city. Further, you state the communications were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Therefore, the city may generally withhold Exhibit 4 under [section 552.107\(1\) of the Government Code](#). However, we note one of the otherwise privileged e-mail strings includes e-mails received from or sent to parties you have not demonstrated are privileged. Furthermore, if these e-mails are removed from the e-mail string and stand alone, they are responsive to the instant request. Therefore, if the city maintains these non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then the city may not withhold the non-privileged e-mails under [section 552.107\(1\) of the Government Code](#).

[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, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to [section 552.111](#) in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). 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 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do 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 (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, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. See Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded a preliminary draft of a document 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.

You state the information at issue consists of advice, opinions, and recommendations of city employees and officials regarding policymaking matters. You further state some of the information at issue consists of draft documents that will be released in their final forms. Upon review, we find the city may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. However, the remaining information is either factual in nature or consists of internal administrative matters that do not rise to the level of policymaking. Therefore, we find the city has failed to demonstrate the remaining information at issue constitutes internal communications containing advice, recommendations, or opinions reflecting the policymaking processes of the city. Accordingly, the city may not withhold any of the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, emergency contact information, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee or official of a governmental body who requests this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code.⁴ See Gov't Code § 552.117(a)(1). We note section 552.117 is also applicable to personal cellular telephone numbers, provided the cellular telephone service is not paid for by a governmental body. See Open Records Decision No. 506 at 5-6 (1988) (section 552.117 not applicable to cellular telephone numbers paid for by governmental body and intended for official use). Whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. See Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus, information may be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) only on behalf of a current or former employee or official who made a request for confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. Information may not be withheld under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee or official who did not timely request under section 552.024 the information be kept confidential. We have marked the cellular telephone numbers of city employees. Therefore, if the employees at issue timely requested confidentiality under section 552.024 of the Government Code and a governmental body does not pay for the cellular telephone service, the city must withhold the information we

have marked under [section 552.117\(a\)\(1\) of the Government Code](#). Conversely, if the employees at issue did not timely request confidentiality under [section 552.024](#) or a governmental body pays for the cellular telephone service, the city may not withhold the marked information under [section 552.117\(a\)\(1\)](#).

In summary, city may withhold Exhibit 2 under [section 552.104\(a\) of the Government Code](#). The city may generally withhold the Exhibit 4 under [section 552.107\(1\) of the Government Code](#). However, if the city maintains the non-privileged e-mails, which we have marked, separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which they appear, then the city may not withhold the non-privileged e-mails under [section 552.107\(1\) of the Government Code](#) and they must be released. The city may withhold the information we have marked under [section 552.111 of the Government Code](#). If the employees at issue timely requested confidentiality under [section 552.024 of the Government Code](#) and a governmental body does not pay for the cellular telephone service, the city must withhold the information we have marked under [section 552.117\(a\)\(1\) of the Government Code](#). The city must release the remaining information.

***5** 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,

Sidney M. Pounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

Footnotes

- ¹ The Act does not require a governmental body that receives a request for information to create information that did not exist when the request was received. See *Econ. Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 563 at 8 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990).
- ² We 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.
- ³ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.
- ⁴ The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

