

FAQ: Ben Taub Hospital Expansion

Updated 11-24-25



Statement: Harris Health is a critical provider of healthcare and emergency services to residents of Harris County and surrounding counties. To ensure that these services are available to meet the needs of the population of Houston, Harris County and the greater southeast Texas region, it is necessary for Harris Health to expand Ben Taub Hospital so that it can provide the increased patient bed capacity necessary to serve the essential trauma, emergency and healthcare needs of all residents.

In 2023, Harris County voters overwhelmingly approved Harris Health's \$2.5 billion bond package to fund its multi-year strategic facilities plan, which authorized the expansion of patient bed capacity at Ben Taub Hospital. To accomplish this mandate, Harris Health plans to expand the hospital's patient bed capacity by building approximately 100 additional private patient rooms through the construction of an addition on park land adjacent to Ben Taub Hospital.

The Need to Expand

Why does Harris Health need to expand the patient bed capacity at Ben Taub Hospital?

Today, Ben Taub Hospital is consistently operating beyond its maximum patient capacity (402 beds). When demand exceeds capacity, patients are often placed in temporary hallway locations throughout the hospital until a room becomes available. While not ideal, these hallway patients receive necessary physician and nursing attention as they wait for a room. Additionally, this requires the hospital to frequently alert Houston Fire Department and EMS partners to take patients to other hospitals because of patient overcrowding. A concerted effort is made to keep trauma care access always available for the community.

How much more capacity is needed?

Based on an extensive analysis relating to needs, patient volume and increased population, Harris Health expects Ben Taub Hospital to see a demand for an additional 18,000 (22% more) emergency visits by 2031 that will require additional patient bed capacity for another 3,200 admissions. The lack of adequate patient bed capacity significantly affects the hospital's availability for patients needing crucial services from emergency to intensive care. Adding 100 patient rooms will extend the useful life of Ben Taub Hospital by 10-15 years or more before a complete replacement is likely to be funded.

Why can't Harris Health just build a new hospital?

To build a complete hospital replacement would likely require more than \$2.5 billion to complete. Harris Health is not in a financial position to do this today. In 2023, voters approved a \$2.5 billion bond to add a new hospital to the LBJ Hospital campus, expand Ben Taub Hospital, and add community clinics. This bond represents Harris Health's maximum

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borrowing capacity. Approximately \$410 million from the voter-approved bond package allows Harris Health to expand patient bed capacity at Ben Taub Hospital, which will help extend its useful life for 10-15 years or more. When Harris Health has completed paying for its current bond, the system may consider asking voters for potential funding for a replacement facility for Ben Taub Hospital.

Related to the \$2.5 billion bond package approved by voters, is the expansion of Ben Taub optional?

No. As part of the bond package approved by voters in 2023, the public was told about the need to extend the life of Ben Taub Hospital and expand patient bed capacity to continue serving the community. The \$410 million investment to expand the hospital must be used for that specific purpose. The only viable way to expand Ben Taub Hospital is by purchase through eminent domain of city-owned park land adjacent to the hospital and directly across from its emergency and trauma center.

Other TMC hospitals can build on top of their existing buildings. Why can't your expansion facility be built on top of the existing Ben Taub Hospital?

It would be ideal to build on top of Ben Taub Hospital if we could. However, Harris Health has studied the issue with architectural and engineering consultants and determined that the existing hospital structure cannot support building up. Also, any efforts to expand vertically would create major operational disruptions through closing sections of the hospital and further impacting capacity for several years, which is why we have arrived at this proposal to expand on adjacent land.

When Ben Taub hospital was built in 1989, it was not designed to accommodate vertical expansion. In addition, every infrastructural system in Ben Taub Hospital is fast approaching its end of useful life and Ben Taub continues to face significant infrastructure challenges just maintaining the systems in place.

Condition assessments completed between 2020-2025 by external firms concluded that a vertical expansion is not feasible without further detailed engineering evaluations of the existing lateral system, a strengthening of the existing roof members, and a potentially very extensive strengthening of the existing columns and foundation. What we've also learned is that any investment in the existing structure would merely sustain aging systems, not resolve the facility's core need to expand space and reduce infrastructure limitations. A facility replacement would still be required in about 20 years as the infrastructure will be well beyond its useful life.

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You talked about adding 100 more beds but expect at least 3,000 more hospital admissions by 2030. What good is 100 beds going to do?

The addition of 100 more beds will accommodate more than 3,000 projected hospital admissions.

To put this into context, 6,000 hospital admissions per year with an average of five inpatient days per patient stay require about 30,000 additional inpatient days. Adding 100 beds will provide 36,500 additional inpatient days on an annual basis.

This will not only provide immediate relief for the urgent capacity needs that Ben Taub Hospital is currently facing but will add additional capacity for the expected surge of patients who will seek our services in the coming months and years due to federal marketplace health insurance and funding changes. This expansion will buy Harris Health additional time until it can fully replace Ben Taub Hospital with a much larger and more capable facility in the next 20-25 years.

The Hermann Park land that Harris Health is currently pursuing is simply one piece of a complex puzzle to address the public healthcare needs of our community for now and for decades to come.

Land Identified for Ben Taub Expansion

Where is the land that Harris Health wants to acquire?

Harris Health has identified 8.9 acres of city-owned park property for the expansion of Ben Taub Hospital. This property is located directly across from the Ben Taub Hospital emergency and trauma center, and is bordered by Lamar Fleming Avenue, Cambridge Street and South Braeswood Boulevard.

Does Harris Health's plan to expand Ben Taub Hospital use land that is part of the Hermann Park Golf Course, Houston Zoo, Miller Outdoor Theater or other park attractions?

No. The proposed parcels of land are directly across from the Ben Taub Hospital emergency and trauma center and separated from the main attractions of the park by Cambridge Street and do not affect any access to the core park attractions. The land will be used to build more patient rooms for Ben Taub Hospital. Although this property is part of Hermann Park, it represents less than 2% of the park's 445 acres.

Why can't the expansion occur on the campus of Ben Taub Hospital?

Unfortunately, it is not a viable option to expand Ben Taub Hospital on the existing site. There is virtually no space to accommodate any new construction or expansion. Additionally, building on top of the existing hospital is out of the question because of the dated condition of the existing building. Importantly, any additional construction on the site would likely prompt service closures within the busy Level I trauma hospital and its outpatient specialty facilities, and endanger the safety of patients, visitors and staff who would likely be in an active construction site for several years.

Why is Harris Health considering the purchase of park land and not opting to acquire another property?

The proximity of this property to Ben Taub Hospital makes it uniquely suitable for construction of much-needed patient beds in a potential hospital addition to be directly connected to Ben Taub Hospital via a sky bridge. Having the addition connected to the hospital gives patients access to all of the specialties and expertise available at a Level I trauma hospital and makes staffing and support of the new structure easier and more efficient.

Why not use the City of Houston building tract of land that is adjacent to the Hermann Park tract of land that Harris Health is trying to acquire?

The Ben Taub Hospital expansion land that Harris Health is currently pursuing needs to be in close proximity to the existing hospital to allow it to connect via a sky bridge so that it can operate as part of Ben Taub Hospital under the same Level I trauma designation and hospital license under state law. The city of Houston tract is simply not close enough to Ben Taub to allow for this connection.

Also, the Ben Taub Hospital expansion facility is meant to be the first phase of the eventual replacement of Ben Taub Hospital with a much larger and more capable Level I trauma center. The City of Houston tract is about 3 acres, while the Hermann Park tracts are just short of 9 acres. At 3 acres, the City of Houston parcel of land is simply not large enough for a future replacement hospital.

The Process to Acquire the Land

What is the process for acquiring the land?

If approved by both the Harris Health Board of Trustees and the Harris County Commissioners Court, following a Chapter 26 public hearing, Harris Health would purchase at fair market value through eminent domain the property in accordance with Chapter 21 of the Texas Property Code. As part of the process, Harris Health will coordinate with the City of Houston, the Hermann Park Conservancy, the Houston Zoo and other stakeholders to ensure that the expansion of Ben Taub Hospital includes all reasonable planning to minimize impact to the remainder of Hermann Park, including exercising its best efforts to preserve and enhance the public's ability to safely and conveniently access the park's amenities.

Until the legal proceedings are complete and ownership is transferred, this land will continue to be used for park purposes by the City of Houston.

What action has been taken by Harris Health's Board of Trustees?

At its September 2025 meeting, the Harris Health Board of Trustees unanimously adopted a resolution containing the determinations and findings required by Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Code and authorized the purchase at fair market value through eminent domain of three parcels within Hermann Park consisting of approximately 8.9 acres. Formal notification to any holders of a property interest will follow any decision by Harris County Commissioners Court to approve eminent domain. The purchase through eminent domain also will adhere to the provisions of Chapter 21 of the Texas Property Code, Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code and in accordance with Section 281.050 of the Texas Health and Safety Code and all other applicable legal requirements.

What happens next in the process?

The September board action has initiated a multi-step process, which includes Harris County Commissioners Court holding a Chapter 26 public hearing to consider approving eminent domain. If approved, notification of all property interest holders — including all holders of a reversionary interest in these parcels — will commence according to statutory requirements. Harris Health remains committed to continuing discussions and working with relevant stakeholders to keep them informed throughout the process.

What is eminent domain?

In Texas, eminent domain allows certain public entities like Harris Health to acquire property for a public necessity, even if the owner doesn't want to sell, provided the owner is adequately compensated. This process does not require a public election.

Will all holders of a property interest in this land be contacted about this matter?

Any person or entity that has a property interest in the land that is subject to eminent domain, including any holders of reversionary interests, will be notified in accordance with Chapter 21 of the Texas Property Code if both the Harris Health Board of Trustees and the Harris County Commissioners Court approve the acquisition of the land. Review and approval by Harris County Commissioners Court remains pending at the time of this writing.

I have heard that the bond language passed by Harris County residents in 2023 excludes the use of bond funds for land acquisition and restricts the use of bond funds to only facility expansion and improvement inside the existing Ben Taub. Is that correct?

This is not correct. The bond proposition language clearly allows Harris Health to purchase land for the Ben Taub Hospital expansion and in no way limits the use of bond funds to facility improvements only inside the existing hospital. Our priority is facility expansion as it is the only way to meet the region's growing demand for trauma and acute medical care. Harris Health will evaluate the most financially responsible decision on how to complete the eminent domain purchase acquisition of the Hermann Park tracts at fair market value.

Is the \$410 million set aside from the bond for Ben Taub expansion sufficient for this project?

Harris Health is confident that the current allocation of funding (\$410 million) from its 2023 bond referendum is sufficient to complete the 100-bed expansion of Ben Taub Hospital.

When will reversionary interest holders (family legal heirs) be contacted about the eminent domain actions?

If Harris County Commissioners Court decides in January to hold a public hearing (TBD: March 19, 2026) and, after the public hearing, finds that a public necessity exists to approve acquiring the land by purchase through eminent domain, only then will the reversionary interest holders be formally notified. Any efforts to notify those with reversionary interests at this early stage would be inappropriate until all approvals have occurred.

What ideas do you have to address and minimize park impact while maximizing benefit to the overall community?

This expansion project does not affect access to Hermann Park's core park attractions. For the Hermann Park tracts of land we are pursuing, we intend to preserve some key features on the land such as trees and walking trails, until such a time we can begin construction of a Ben Taub Hospital replacement facility in 20-25 years. All efforts will be made to minimize traffic disruptions and address flooding concerns through appropriate studies and mitigation measures.

Also, Harris Health's intent is to collaborate extensively with the City and Hermann Park Conservancy and to get guidance from park experts to ensure there are no impacts on the park's main amenities or the zoo, and to beautify the future hospital site by developing a healing garden and enhancing other public areas to aesthetically fit the overall park environment.

Why Not Relocate or Build Elsewhere

Why don't you build elsewhere? Does the patient addition have to be connected to the Ben Taub Hospital?

By constructing the expansion facility in a location that can connect to Ben Taub Hospital, patients retain access to all of the hospital's existing services without the need for duplication. If the inpatient addition were built elsewhere, it would have to be constructed as a stand-alone hospital with all the required support systems and services to provide the breadth of hospital care. Essentially, a new hospital would need to be built. Unfortunately, Harris Health does not have the borrowing capacity to build another new hospital, which would cost approximately \$2.5 billion or more to complete.

Additionally, Ben Taub Hospital operates under a single Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) license, covering all the services provided on the hospital campus. By ensuring physical connectivity, the new inpatient addition would qualify as an extension of the

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hospital license, thus avoiding regulatory complexity and delays.

Why is it important Ben Taub Hospital remain in the Texas Medical Center (TMC)?

As a major teaching hospital and clinical training ground for Baylor College of Medicine, Ben Taub Hospital is also affiliated with dozens of nursing and allied health colleges in the TMC. The close physical proximity to other academic and TMC patient-care institutions enhances academic collaboration, research integration and clinical training. Rotations, research projects, and cross-institutional programs benefit from this shared location, allowing seamless movement of students, residents and medical faculty.

As the only public healthcare system in the TMC, Ben Taub Hospital is the way that the underserved can continue to benefit from the medical expertise available in the TMC.

Have Harris Health leaders met with Hermann Park Conservancy Board?

Harris Health's President and CEO Esmaeil Porsa, MD, has met with the past and current executive directors of Hermann Park Conservancy and a few members of the board individually, but not with the entire board.

The Harris County Commissioners Court directed Harris Health leadership to meet with Hermann Park Conservancy Board at least twice before Jan. 20, 2026. Harris Health is working with the conservancy to schedule these meetings and plans to have at least one meeting before the end of 2025.

Harris Health looks forward to meeting with the Hermann Park Conservancy Board to learn more about their concerns and is committed to listening to the conservancy board and possibly collaborating on ideas that can mutually benefit both organizations and all County residents.

Harris Health also continues to engage in conversations with the City of Houston, the legal owner of the land, who will be a critical partner in these collaborations with Hermann Park.