

FAQ: Ben Taub Hospital Expansion

Updated 01-02-26



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 growing trauma, emergency and healthcare needs of the population of Houston, Harris County and the greater southeast Texas region, it is necessary for Harris Health to expand the inpatient capacity of Ben Taub Hospital.

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 potential construction of an expansion facility 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 Emergency Medical Service 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 accommodate the expected demand before a complete replacement can be funded in 20-25 years.

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 also 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.

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

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 to effectively serve the community. The \$410 million investment to expand the hospital legally must be used for that specific purpose. Harris Health has evaluated many options, and the only fiscally responsible and operationally 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.

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. [See maps and photos here.](#)

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. We propose that the land 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.

What is the Hermann Park land that Harris Health is pursuing currently used for?

Currently, the land contains trees, limited walking trails and a few picnic tables. As per Hermann Park Conservancy's Master Plan, they have created conceptual plans to eventually place a parking garage on this land. [Learn more on their website here.](#)

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What alternative options were explored before determining that Hermann Park land was the only viable option?

| Option | Determination |
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| Vertical Expansion of Existing Ben Taub Hospital | <p>Harris Health has evaluated this issue with architectural engineering consultants as part of a condition assessment review of the hospital. When Ben Taub Hospital was built in 1989, it was simply not designed or built with structural and foundational support to accommodate vertical expansion within the facility itself. In addition, every infrastructural system in Ben Taub Hospital is fast approaching its end of useful life. Further, any efforts to add floors to the top of Ben Taub would create major operational disruptions as significant sections of the hospital would be closed to accommodate the construction, further reducing capacity for several years. Any new construction in the inpatient units of the existing Ben Taub Hospital will necessitate the entire inpatient environment to be brought up to today's hospital code which requires single-occupancy rooms. This would result in a significant net loss of beds since the current Ben Taub Hospital has double and quad occupancy rooms.</p> |
| Building on Another Location on the Existing Ben Taub Campus Footprint | <p>The current campus footprint is not conducive to building an expansion facility that maintains current healthcare standards. Physical space is an issue. Proximity to existing buildings with ongoing hospital operations, and limited space for cranes and construction staging would not allow for expansion on the current campus. Further, site constraints would likely result in a significant increase in construction costs and the standard operating ratio of total beds per floor would not be met if construction were attempted. Similarly, there are no effective construction options to connect an expansion facility to the existing hospital on the campus that would not reduce current hospital capacity.</p> <p>Additionally, attempting to construct an expansion facility on the existing campus would not provide sufficient room for future expansion nor does it help to address the long term need to replace the existing Ben Taub Hospital. The current hospital will need to be demolished before a full replacement facility can be built. If the expansion facility is built within the existing Ben Taub Hospital footprint, that means the expansion facility would also need to eventually be demolished. There would be a complete loss of the Level 1 Trauma Center during the demolition, reconstruction and accreditation period.</p> |
| Building on Cabin Property | <p>Along Cambridge Street and adjacent to Ben Taub Hospital is a cabin on 1.6 acres of property serving as the San Jacinto Daughters of the Republic of Texas museum/chapter house. That property is an irregular shape and not suitable for a patient facility due to the following reasons: (1) significant impact to Ben Taub Loop Circle and Cambridge street configuration that would require rerouting; (2) a facility fitting on this property would not meet the required beds per floor for sustainable operational patient care; (3) site restrictions would increase cost per square foot due to the expected dimensions of the facility; (4) no space for construction staging and limited area for a tower crane; (5) no option</p> |

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| | for future expansion needs; (6) and difficult to meet water retention requirements due to size and location of the site. |
| Converting The Ben Taub Tower (BTT) or Neuropsychiatric Center (NPC) to Inpatient Use | The BTT and NPC are built to business occupancy vs. hospital occupancy, which is appropriate for their current use, but a lower standard on multiple infrastructure systems, fire code, patient safety items and multiple other regulatory and accreditation standards. In addition, the building dimensions were not configured to support inpatient care. The conversion of these buildings into hospital occupancy would be physically, financially, and operationally unfeasible. |
| Use Of Adjacent Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) Building | As of December 2025, BCM has confirmed that it is not relocating. BCM is expanding into TMC's Helix Park and has no immediate or future plans to vacate the current medical school location. Additionally, BCM's building is recognized as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, which comes with a certain measure of protection under state law. |
| Building Elsewhere in the Texas Medical Center | The Ben Taub Hospital expansion facility must be in close enough 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, and also to prevent the need for costly duplication of support services and staffing that Ben Taub currently offers. There is no location in the Texas Medical Center that meets this requirement. |
| Use of City of Houston building tract of land | <p>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.</p> <p>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. Indeed, this land would not be large enough for even the proposed expansion facility.</p> |
| Relocation of Ben Taub Outside of the Texas Medical Center | <p>A new facility not connected to the existing Ben Taub 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.</p> <p>Additionally, operating at any location other than the adjacent location to the existing Ben Taub will require the new hospital to undergo the Level I trauma designation process that is, at best, a 3 to 5-year process. This could mean that Harris County may possibly go without one of its only two adult Level I trauma designated hospitals during the transition process to the new location. Harris County cannot afford the reduction in</p> |

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| | Level I trauma services that could occur if the replacement hospital is built elsewhere, nor could Harris Health afford to operate the existing Ben Taub Trauma Center and a new replacement Level 1 Trauma Center simultaneously for multiple years while a new hospital undergoes trauma designation. |
| Use of Harris Health's hospital on the LBJ campus to address BT capacity issues | LBJ Hospital currently operates under similar capacity constraints as Ben Taub. When the new hospital on the LBJ campus opens in 2029, the additional beds will address LBJ's (not Ben Taub's) capacity issues. Further, the new hospital on the LBJ Hospital campus is being constructed as a Level I capable hospital but will not be a Level I trauma designated hospital when it opens its doors to the public; it will open as the same certified Level III trauma hospital as it currently exists. We expect a formal designation and upgrade to Level I status after several years of gradual increase in staffing, and the required accreditation from the American College of Surgeons and the Texas Department of State Health Services (the earliest possible opportunity is likely 2035). |

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. The Ben Taub Hospital expansion facility must be in close enough 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, and also to prevent the need for costly duplication of support services and staffing that Ben Taub currently offers.

Why do you need nearly nine acres of land?

The 8.9 acres of park land under consideration is meant to address two issues:

- **Short term:** The 8.9 acres will provide the space Harris Health needs for the creation of the expansion facility for adding around 100 additional inpatient beds to current Ben Taub Hospital capacity of 402 licensed beds.
- **Long term:** Harris Health has maintained that this expansion facility is meant to serve as the first phase for the complete replacement of Ben Taub Hospital in the future once Harris Health may be able to finance the construction of the replacement hospital, which is currently estimated to cost about \$2.5 billion. Harris Health must have the entire 8.9 acres so that we can have a thoughtful design of a future hospital that will incorporate the initial expansion facility into its design.

For context, the current, undersized Ben Taub hospital and garage sit on 11.43 acres. The new hospital and central utility plant on the LBJ campus sit on 11.84 acres (not including the existing outpatient facility, any parking garages or green spaces which total approximately 10 additional

acres).

What are some of the resiliency plans Harris Health is considering as part of its planning for the expansion of Ben Taub Hospital?

Harris Health places a high priority on resiliency and long-term sustainability, particularly when addressing risks such as flooding, power grid interruptions, and utility failures. We are committed to building resilient structures as evidenced by the new hospital construction on the LBJ campus which incorporates many proven resiliency features, such as:

- an 8-million-gallon underground cistern;
- a first-floor level constructed more than five feet above the existing legacy hospital elevation;
- an additional crawl space underneath all buildings (hospital, central plant and garage) that achieves 8.5 million gallons of total water retention;
- a dual fuel capable central utility plant to ensure continuity of operations during power disruptions; and
- an impermeable underground utility tunnel designed to protect critical infrastructure from water intrusion.

That same level of care will guide the Ben Taub expansion facility and the future Ben Taub replacement hospital. Harris Health is committed to protecting these facilities from adverse weather events while also safeguarding the surrounding environment, including precious park land and other nearby medical facilities.

Harris Health has several in-house engineers with deep expertise in resiliency planning and we also intend to seek guidance from third-party experts in resilient design and construction. We intend for resiliency to be integrated not only in the buildings, but also into the surrounding greenspace, ensuring the site contributes to flood mitigation.

The Process to Acquire the Land

What is the process for acquiring the land?

It is a multi-step process. The first step, which requires approval from the Harris Health Board of Trustees, has already occurred. Next, if approved by the Harris County Commissioners Court, following a Chapter 26 public hearing, Harris Health would purchase the property at fair market value through eminent domain 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

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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 23, 2025 Harris Health 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 potentially on March 19, 2026. 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.

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

If Harris County Commissioners Court decides in January 2026 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

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formally notified. Any efforts to notify those with reversionary interests at this early stage would be inappropriate until all approvals have occurred.

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 approximately 100-bed expansion of Ben Taub Hospital.

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 Harris Health is 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 replacement 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?

Ben Taub Hospital operates under a single Texas Health and Human Services Commission license, covering all the services provided on the hospital campus. By ensuring physical connectivity, a new inpatient expansion facility would qualify as an extension of the hospital license, thus avoiding regulatory complexity and delays. The Ben Taub Hospital expansion land must 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 proximity of this property to Ben Taub Hospital makes it uniquely suitable for construction of much-

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needed patient beds in a potential hospital addition to be directly connected to Ben Taub Hospital via a sky bridge.

The proximity and physical connection of the expansion facility to Ben Taub Hospital also ensures critical services like diagnostic radiology, phlebotomy, lab, pathology, security and specialty services and staff are available to patients treated in the expansion facility.

For example, if a patient in the expansion facility requires an immediate surgical procedure, the skybridge provides the quick connection to surgical suites in the hospital and the necessary recovery areas. Likewise, if a patient in the expansion facility requires an emergency CT scan, the skybridge provides a quick and safe connection to the hospital's radiology department to perform the test.

If the expansion facility was built anywhere else, within or outside of the Texas Medical Center, it would be cost prohibitive to duplicate these, and other services, as well as the staff needed who provide these services. Building another independently licensed hospital would cost approximately \$2.5 billion or more 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 inpatient bed capacity, and add community clinics. This bond represents Harris Health's maximum borrowing capacity. Approximately \$410 million from the voter-approved bond package allows Harris Health to expand patient bed capacity at Ben Taub Hospital until a full replacement hospital can be constructed. 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.

What is the maximum distance for a skybridge?

Texas regulations, including the Life and Safety Code, regarding the maximum distance of a skybridge or walkway connecting the inpatient expansion to the main hospital do not specify an exact number, but the general principle is that the distance should be driven by optimal operations for patients transfers and clinical logistics, particularly in case of emergencies. Additionally, the skybridge must meet fire and life safety standards, accessibility requirements and extend the Inpatient/Hospital occupancy to include the new tower. Maximum distance is driven by life safety, distance between rated structures, views and windows requirements for new and existing patient rooms.

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

As the only public safety-net hospital in the Texas Medical Center, maintaining Ben Taub Hospital in the Texas Medical Center sends a clear message to the community that in Houston and Harris County, equitable healthcare is available to everyone regardless of economic or insurance considerations. Patients at Ben Taub Hospital will continue to have access to advances in technology, research and care available through the collaborations with medical school partners Baylor College of Medicine and other Texas Medical Center hospitals and institutions. Rotations,

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research projects, and cross-institutional programs benefit from this shared location, allowing seamless movement of students, residents and medical faculty. Patients will also benefit from the TMC's significant infrastructure resiliency plan that supports the continued operation of TMC hospitals and their ability to provide essential services to patients during and after extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

Have Harris Health leaders met with Hermann Park Conservancy Board?

Harris Health met with the Hermann Park Conservancy Board on December 1, 2025, and with Hermann Park Conservancy administrative staff on December 18, 2025. Harris Health has also accepted an invitation to participate in the Hermann Park Conservancy's Town Hall meeting on January 7, 2026. Harris Health looks forward to continuing to meet 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.

Project Support

What organizations have provided a letter of support for this initiative?

- Baylor College of Medicine
- Baylor St. Luke's Hospital
- Boilermakers Local 72
- Greater Houston Partnership
- Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Harris County Medical Society
- Harris Health Strategic Fund
- HCHD Foundation
- Houston Fire Fighters Association
- Houston Gulf Coast Building & Construction Trades Council
- Houston Police Officers' Union
- Houston Recovery Center/Sobering Center
- IBEW Local 716
- IUOE Local 31
- IUOE Local 450
- Insulators Local 22
- Memorial Hermann Hospital
- Mental Health America of Greater Houston
- The Methodist Hospital
- Texas State Senator Borris L. Miles
- Pipefitters Local 211
- Plumbers Local 68
- SETRAC

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- SMART Local 54
- Texas Children's Hospital
- Texas Medical Center
- The Metropolitan Organization of Houston
- Harris County Precinct 6 Constable Silvia R. Trevino
- UTHealth Houston Medical School
- Texas State Rep. Armando Walle