

Frequently Asked Questions: Ben Taub Hospital Expansion and Bayou Parkland West

Updated January 2026

These Frequently Asked Questions were updated in late December 2025 to reflect the current status of discussions regarding the proposed Ben Taub Hospital expansion and nearby parkland. Because this is an active and evolving public process, information may continue to change. Hermann Park Conservancy remains committed to sharing timely, accurate updates with the community.

For clarity, Hermann Park Conservancy refers to the broader area under discussion as Bayou Parkland West. This area includes the Warnecke Tract as well as adjacent parkland along Brays Bayou that functions together as a connected landscape for access, circulation, flood resilience, and public use.

What is being proposed in Bayou Parkland West?

Harris Health has proposed expanding the Ben Taub Hospital campus, which may require acquiring land within a portion of Hermann Park known as Bayou Parkland West. This area includes the Warnecke Tract and adjacent parkland. The proposal is currently under public and legal review, and no final decision has been made.

Has a decision been made to take parkland?

No. A final decision to acquire parkland has not been made. Several required steps remain, including a public process required by Texas law and potential future vote by Harris County Commissioners Court.

What is Bayou Parkland West and why does it matter?

Bayou Parkland West is a continuous stretch of parkland at Cambridge Street and MacGregor Way that plays an important role in flood mitigation, public access, safety, and connectivity to other areas of Hermann Park.

While the Warnecke Tract is a key component of this area, Bayou Parkland West functions as an integrated landscape rather than as isolated parcels. Decisions affecting one portion of this area have implications for the broader Park system.

What is the Warnecke Tract?

The Warnecke Tract is a portion of Bayou Parkland West that was donated to the City of Houston with the intent that it be protected and used as parkland. It has long been included in Hermann Park planning efforts to address congestion, access, safety, and visitor experience.

What law governs the potential use of parkland for this project?

Texas Parks and Wildlife Code Chapter 26 applies when public parkland may be used for another public purpose. Under Chapter 26, parkland may only be taken if there is no feasible and prudent alternative, and if all reasonable planning has been done to minimize harm to the park.

Public input is a required part of this process.

What is Hermann Park Conservancy's role?

Hermann Park Conservancy is a private nonprofit organization that works in partnership with the City of Houston to care for, improve, and advocate for Hermann Park. While the Conservancy does not own the land or control the legal process, it plays a critical role as steward, planner, and advocate for the Park and its users.

All Conservancy work is guided by the publicly informed Hermann Park Master Plan created by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates in 2017.

What is the Conservancy's position?

We respect Harris Health's mission and recognize Houston's healthcare needs. At the same time, parkland is a limited and irreplaceable public resource.

Our position is:

- Parkland should only be taken if no feasible alternative exists.
- Any unavoidable impact on Bayou Parkland West must be minimized.
- If parkland is ultimately taken, Hermann Park must receive meaningful, dedicated public benefits in return.

Is the Conservancy opposed to healthcare expansion?

No. The Conservancy supports strong public healthcare. Our role is to ensure that decisions affecting Hermann Park meet legal requirements, respect public trust, and do not unnecessarily sacrifice parkland when alternatives may exist.

Are alternatives to taking parkland being considered?

The Conservancy continues to press for full evaluation of alternatives, including different site configurations and long-term planning options. Chapter 26 requires that alternatives be seriously examined before parkland can be approved for another use.

What does “meaningful compensation” mean if parkland is taken?

If parkland is taken as a last resort, the Conservancy believes Hermann Park should receive clearly defined, binding, and dedicated benefits that directly serve the public.

Any such commitments should be secured before a land transfer and be proportional to the value of what the public is giving up.

What kinds of improvements could benefit the Park?

If compensation becomes necessary, it could support projects already identified through public planning, including:

- Improved parking and circulation to reduce congestion
 - Safer pedestrian and bicycle connections
 - Expanded recreational and wellness amenities
 - Enhancements to gardens and healing spaces
 - Infrastructure investments that improve access and safety for all users
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Is a land swap still possible?

A land swap has been discussed, including the potential return of existing Ben Taub hospital land to park use in the future. However, details and enforceable commitments around a land swap remain uncertain. The Conservancy continues to advocate for clarity and binding outcomes rather than assumptions.

Has Hermann Park lost land before?

Yes. Over many decades, significant portions of what was once parkland were used for civic and institutional purposes, including the Texas Medical Center. These cumulative losses underscore the importance of carefully evaluating any additional impacts to remaining parkland today.

How does this affect the Warnecke family's original gift?

The Warnecke family made a generous gift of land with the clear intent that it serves the people of Houston as permanent parkland. That intent matters deeply to Hermann Park Conservancy and is central to how we approach this issue.

Protecting donor intent and the public trust is a core responsibility of the Conservancy. It is why the potential loss of any portion of Bayou Parkland West is taken so seriously, and why we continue to advocate for alternatives and for outcomes that honor the purpose of the original gift.

If circumstances ultimately result in a change to the land, the Conservancy is committed to honoring the spirit of the Warnecke family's generosity by ensuring that any outcomes meaningfully benefit the Park and its users, and reflect the values of stewardship, access, and healing that motivated the original donation.

What is the current status of the process?

Public meetings are underway as part of the Chapter 26 review process. Harris County Commissioners Court has not yet taken a final vote on condemnation. Discussions among stakeholders are ongoing.

What happens next?

Before any parkland could be taken:

- The Chapter 26 process must be completed
- Public input must be considered
- Legal standards must be met
- Any future action would require formal votes

The Conservancy will continue to engage actively throughout this process.

How can the public stay informed or participate?

Park users and residents can:

- Attend public meetings related to the proposal
- Review materials and submit questions or comments through official channels
- Contact their Harris County Commissioner or City Council Member
- Follow updates from Hermann Park Conservancy

Public engagement is an important part of this process.

Where can I find updates?

Hermann Park Conservancy will share its views, positions, and updates only through its official website and official social media channels. While others may express their own perspectives or advocacy related to Hermann Park, the Conservancy's communications are the sole source for its official statements and information.

Terminology note: *“Bayou Parkland West” is used for planning clarity and reflects how this area functions within Hermann Park’s Master Plan.*