

Hermann Park Conservancy: Frequently Asked Questions

What is happening with Ben Taub and the Warnecke Tract?

Harris Health System has begun the process of acquiring approximately 8.9 acres of Hermann Park, known as the Warnecke Tract, to expand the Ben Taub Hospital campus. This is proceeding through eminent domain, meaning the Park will lose this land regardless of our opposition.

When did the Conservancy first learn that Harris Health planned to expand Ben Taub and take land from the Park?

We were first made aware of a possible expansion in early 2024. Formal notice of the plan to condemn the land came in mid-2025. While there were some early references to conceptual ideas, the reality of losing this parcel through eminent domain became clear during the last few months.

Why is the issue back in the news?

Harris County Commissioners Court has delayed a vote on condemnation until Spring 2026 and is requiring Harris Health to hold a series of public meetings throughout Harris County to inform taxpayers of the plans. Learn more about the plans and the public meetings [here](#).

What is Hermann Park Conservancy, and what is its role in this process?

Hermann Park Conservancy is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to the stewardship and improvement of Hermann Park. While the Park itself is publicly owned by the City of Houston, the Conservancy works in partnership with the City to care for this treasured civic asset. Through a long-term agreement, the Conservancy leads planning, fundraising, and implementation of capital improvements and maintenance efforts that enhance the Park for millions of annual visitors.

All of this work is guided by a publicly informed Master Plan, created by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates in 2017. This plan reflects the community's collective vision for the Park's future — a vision we remain deeply committed to.

Although we do not own the land, the Conservancy plays an essential role as advocate and partner. We will continue to advocate strongly for outcomes that honor the spirit of the Park, uphold the public trust, and support a resilient future for all Houstonians who love and rely on this greenspace.

What is the Conservancy's position on the proposed expansion?

We respect Harris Health's mission and understand Houston's healthcare crisis. However, this is land that belongs to the people of Houston and the parkland, once lost, is gone forever. Park users and taxpayers deserve an equal or greater benefit in return.

As stewards of Hermann Park, we are requesting meaningful compensation for the seizure of the land. These funds would allow the Conservancy to realize components of our publicly informed [master plan](#), investing in projects that would improve access and public amenities for all Park users for generations to come.

What would "meaningful compensation" look like?

Under condemnation, the Warnecke heirs must be compensated for their legal interest, and the City of Houston could also receive proceeds for the parcel—funds not automatically dedicated to Hermann Park. The Conservancy believes that, in addition to those required payments, Hermann Park should receive substantial, dedicated compensation—commensurate with the land's extraordinary public value—to fund Park projects that restore access, parking relief, and visitor benefits lost through this taking. Those commitments should be clearly defined and secured before any land transfer so Park users gain a real and lasting return for what they're giving up.

What would the compensation be used for?

The Conservancy is currently executing a publicly informed master plan and associated capital campaign to transform Hermann Park. Compensation would allow us to accelerate that work, particularly focusing on projects that advance public health and safety.

Here's a list of just a few of the projects that could benefit:

- Conversion of confusing, congested surface parking at the heart of the Park into a landscaped parking structure that creates greenspace above
- A safe, inclusive recreational trail loop
- New sports fields and wellness zones
- Renovation of our tranquil Japanese Garden to include healing features
- Improved bike lanes, trail, and parking to better support the visitor experience

How is the Conservancy engaging in the process?

We're fully engaged—in meetings with city and county leaders, working with legal counsel, coordinating with community stakeholders, and demanding the strongest possible outcome for the Park.

Why not wait for a land swap?

We support the idea of a land swap, specifically the return of the existing Ben Taub site to Park use once it is decommissioned. Earlier this year, Harris County and Harris Health representatives indicated that the current Ben Taub site would be returned to Park use, but recent discussions and media statements do not reference a land swap. This is why we are aggressively seeking meaningful compensation now.

Is this the first time Hermann Park has lost land?

No. In fact, Ben Taub Hospital itself and large portions, over 130 acres, of the Texas Medical Center were built on former parkland. Over time, these losses have added up.

What about the Warnecke family? Didn't they donate this land to be protected as parkland forever?

Yes, the Warnecke family donated the land with the intent that it be used for Park purposes. That intent is not lost on us. It's why we've fought so hard to protect this tract, and why this moment is so difficult.

Unfortunately, the legal obligation under eminent domain is to extinguish deed restrictions as part of compensating both the Warnecke heirs and the Park. This means the family must be paid for the loss of the restrictions they placed on the land, and Hermann Park must be compensated for the public loss of parkland.

It's important to note that we deeply value philanthropic land gifts, and we don't see this as precedent-setting. This is a rare and extreme case; eminent domain should never be taken lightly. We hope future families considering a gift of land to the Park aren't discouraged by this unusual situation.

We continue to be grateful to the Warnecke family and are committed to honoring the spirit of their original gift in how we invest any compensation we receive — by building spaces that promote healing, wellness, and public access.

What is the legal process from here?

The property is currently in the process of being taken by eminent domain, a legal mechanism by which public entities can acquire land for public use. The City and County are responsible for carrying out the legal proceedings and determining how any compensation is distributed among the parties involved.

The Conservancy isn't a party to those legal proceedings and doesn't control how the process unfolds. However, we're committed to advocating for a fair outcome for the Park and will continue to work with the City to ensure that the Park and its users aren't left behind in this process.

Why does this land matter so much to Hermann Park?

This tract wasn't just future potential; it was part of our plan, and we had already invested several hundred thousand dollars into the planning and assessment for its development. It provided vital space to address Park overcrowding, bayou access, safety challenges, and parking constraints. Losing it hurts. Our goal now is to ensure the public gets something meaningful in return.

How can I get involved?

As a Park user and taxpayer, you can support Hermann Park's future by attending a public meeting (see schedule [here](#)), submit your questions or comments to Harris Health at bentaubexpansion@harrishealth.org, or contact your Harris County Commissioner and City Council Members.