

UTHealth breaks ground on \$299M research tower in Texas Medical Center's Helix Park

By Jeff Jeffrey
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The UTHealth Houston School of Public Health has broken ground on a \$299 million research facility in the Texas Medical Center's new Helix Park campus.

UTHealth said the 10-story, 350,000-square-foot tower will help to advance the school's mission of pursuing health promotion and disease prevention, creating sustainable access to affordable health care and training the next generation of leaders in public health sciences.

The building will house research laboratories with distance-learning technology, an auditorium, a teaching kitchen for dietetic interns, collaborative spaces, and classrooms focusing on epidemiology, genetics, nutrition, health policy, data science and health promotion.

"This new state-of-the-art facility will serve as a platform for our students, faculty and staff — allowing them to transform the lives and health of our communities through public health education and research," Giuseppe Colasurdo, president of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, said in a statement.

The building was designed with an emphasis on sustainability, UTHealth said. The tower will have systems for rainwater harvesting for irrigation, increased natural light, green spaces, a holistic teaching garden and building automation programming. Employees will also have access to an upper-level terrace.

UTHealth tapped Houston-based Kirksey Architecture to design the project in collaboration with Detroit, Michigan-based SmithGroup. Houston-based Vaughn Construction is serving as general contractor for the project.

The new facility is scheduled to open in time for the fall semester in 2026.

UTHealth's Houston campus was founded in 1967, and it now has community engagement centers and faculty across the state, including in Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, El Paso and Brownsville.

The institution's research efforts seek to address a wide range of health-related issues, including underserved border communities, DNA sequence analysis on a population scale, promoting healthy behaviors in schools and workplace safety on farms and factories.

The new tower marks the latest addition to the TMC's new 37-acre Helix Park. The first phase of the project is already well underway, with the first buildings set to open there later this year.

On Jan. 10, TMC and Beacon Capital Partners announced Baylor College of Medicine will be the anchor for Dynamic One, one of Helix Park's four industry buildings. Baylor's 114,000 square feet of lab and office space will span three floors of the 355,000-square-foot building.

Dynamic One is one of several Helix Park buildings set to open at the end of 2023, according to TMC officials. Another is TMC's own headquarters, which includes space for retail on the ground floor and offices for venture capital on the upper floors.

In addition to laboratory and retail space, TMC's headquarters includes space for lectures and presentations, including a 350-seat space in the atrium. On the building's fourth and highest floor, three TMC member institutions — the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Texas A&M University and UTHealth — will have over 24,000 square feet of overlapping lab and office space.

TMC CEO Bill McKeon has described Helix Park as a "medical city" district, with an emphasis on getting people to connect both inside and out of buildings and to be more than a research location.

The Helix Park project is expected to create more than 26,000 permanent jobs and have a \$5.4 billion annual economic impact.

The campus's eponymous helix-shaped parks, designed by Mikyoung Kim, are also expected to be among the Helix Park features opening in late 2023. The parks are intended to be an injection of green space, which McKeon has said is lacking on TMC's current campuses. Retail kiosks are expected to set up shop in the parks, and outdoor event space will be available for performances.