

FAQ: HFSC Facility Plans

MAIN MESSAGE: The City of Houston and the Houston Forensic Science Center have found a cost-neutral option that will provide the city's crime lab with the added space it needs in one downtown facility. The City will not have to provide additional funding or hold a bond election, as opposed to other municipalities that have spent tens of millions of dollars to construct new buildings for their crime labs.

1) What is the Houston Forensic Science Center's current facility situation?

HFSC currently has about 80,000 square feet on 11 floors in four different facilities. The primary wet lab space for DNA, seized drugs, toxicology, firearms and latent print processing, is in HPD's downtown headquarters at 1200 Travis. A few administrative functions, as well as the forensic multimedia unit and the latent print examiners, are in a separate leased space at 1301 Fannin.

2) What are some issues the crime lab faces by being in HPD headquarters?

The HPD building was not built or designed with forensics in mind. The HPD building has insufficient electrical capacity, making it impossible for HFSC to install the instruments and equipment it needs. The space is also inflexible, making parts of the building unusable while in other areas people are squeezed in like sardines. Finally, the cooling system is insufficient to properly support operations, and has at times failed completely, forcing HFSC to shut down operations.

3) Why is it problematic for HFSC to operate in four different facilities?

Operating in separate facilities keeps HFSC from operating as efficiently as possible. While HFSC has reduced both backlogs and turnaround times since it took over the HPD crime lab in 2014, it struggles to make additional progress because of its inefficient facilities. In addition, being spread out makes it both difficult and expensive for HFSC to properly secure all the various entrances and exits on its 11 floors in four buildings.

4) New facility details

The new facility would provide HFSC with four floors and a portion of the basement at 500 Jefferson. The cost is neutral and fits within HFSC's current \$2.6 million facility budget. HFSC will operate in more than 80,000 square feet in one building pursuant to a 30-year lease. The wet lab space will be specifically built and designed as a forensic science lab, and will include a proper ventilation system, independent security and an adequate power supply. The landlord will finance the cost of the renovation.

5) Is it a problem that the new facility is also in a high-rise?

No. HFSC will be on only four floors in one building. The basement will house the firearms shooting range and CSU processing, allowing HFSC to minimize the movement of firearms and sensitive evidence. The new facility will provide more space in one area, instead of across buildings. It will allow HFSC to relocate to better space at an affordable price with the opportunity for future expansion in the same building.