TEXAS LANDOWNER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

This Bill of Rights applies to any attempt by the government or a private entity to take your property. The contents of this Bill of Rights are prescribed by the Texas Legislature in Texas Government Code Sec. 402.031 and Chapter 21 of the Texas Property Code.

1. You are entitled to receive adequate compensation if your property is taken for a public use.
2. Your property can only be taken for a public use.
3. Your property can only be taken by a governmental entity or private entity authorized by law to do so.
4. The entity that wants to take your property must notify you about its interest in taking your property.
5. The entity proposing to take your property must provide you with an assessment of the adequate compensation for your property.
6. The entity proposing to take your property must make a good faith offer to buy the property before it files a lawsuit to condemn the property.
7. You may hire an appraiser or other professional to determine the value of your property or to assist you in any condemnation proceeding.
8. You may hire an attorney to negotiate with the condemning entity and to represent you in any legal proceedings involving the condemnation.
9. Before your property is condemned, you are entitled to a hearing before a court-appointed panel that includes three special commissioners. This specialized hearing panel must determine the amount of compensation the condemning entity owes for the taking of your property. The commissioners must also determine what compensation, if any, you are entitled to receive for any reduction in value of your remaining property.
10. If you are unsatisfied with the compensation awarded by the special commissioners, or if you question whether the taking of your property was proper, you have the right to a trial by a judge or jury. If you are dissatisfied with the trial court's judgment, you may appeal that decision.

CONDEMNATION PROCEDURE

Eminent Domain is the ability of certain entities to take private property for a public use. Private property can include land and certain improvements that are on that property.

Private property may only be taken by a governmental entity or private entity authorized by law to do so.

Your property may be taken only for a public use. Eminent domain cannot be used to take your property for economic development purposes, except for limited exceptions provided by law.

Your property cannot be taken without adequate compensation. Adequate compensation includes the market value of the property being taken. It may also include certain damages, if any, to your remaining property caused by the acquisition itself or by the way the condemning entity will use the property.

How the Taking Process Begins

The taking of private property by eminent domain must follow certain procedures. First, the entity that wants to condemn your property must notify you about its interest in acquiring your property. Second, before a condemning entity begins negotiating with you to acquire your property, it must send this Landowner's Bill of Rights statement to the last known address of the person in whose name the property is listed on the most recent tax roll.

Third, the condemning entity must make a good faith offer to purchase the property. The condemning entity's offer must be based on an investigation and an assessment of adequate compensation for the property. At the time the offer is made, the governmental condemning entity must disclose any appraisal reports it used to determine the value of its offer to acquire the property. You have the right to either accept or reject the offer made by the condemning entity.

Condemnation Proceedings

If you and the condemning entity do not agree on the value of the property being taken, the entity may begin condemnation proceedings. Condemnation is the legal process for the taking of private property. It begins with a condemning entity filing a claim for your property in court. If you live in a county where part of the property being condemned is located, the claim

must be filed in that county. Otherwise, the claim can be filed in any county where at least part of the property being condemned is located. The claim must describe the property being condemned, the intended public use, the name of the landowner, a statement that the landowner and the condemning entity were unable to agree on the value of the property, and that the condemning entity provided the landowner with the Landowner's Bill of Rights statement.

Special Commissioners' Hearing

After the condemning entity files a claim in court, the judge will appoint three landowners to serve as special commissioners. These special commissioners must live in the county where the condemnation proceeding is filed, and they must take an oath to assess the amount of adequate compensation fairly, impartially, and according to the law. The special commissioners are not authorized to decide whether the condemnation is necessary or if the public use is proper. After being appointed, the special commissioners must schedule a hearing at the earliest practical time and place and provide you written notice of that hearing.

You are required to disclose to the governmental condemning entity, at least ten days before the special commissioners' hearing, any appraisal reports used to determine your opinion about adequate compensation for the property. You may hire an appraiser or real estate professional to help your determine the value of your private property. You may also hire an attorney regarding these proceedings.

At the hearing, the special commissioners will consider evidence on the value of the property, the damages to remaining property, any value added to the remaining property as a result of the project, and the uses to be made of the property being taken.

Special Commissioners' Award

After hearing evidence from all interested parties, the special commissioners will determine the amount of money to be awarded as adequate compensation. You may be responsible for the costs if the Award is less than or equal to the amount the condemning entity offered before the condemnation proceeding began. Otherwise, the condemning entity will be responsible for the costs. The special commissioners will give a written decision to the court that appointed them. That decision is called the "Award." The Award must be filed with the court and the court must send written notice of the Award to all parties.

After the Award is filed, the condemning entity may take possession of the property being condemned, even if either party appeals the Award of the special commissioners. To take possession of the property, the condemning entity must either pay you the amount of the Award or deposit the amount of the Award into the registry of the court. You have the right to withdraw the deposited funds from the registry of the court.

Objection to the Special Commissioners' Award

If either you or the condemning entity is dissatisfied with the amount of the Award, either party can object to the Award by filing a written statement of objection with the court. If neither party timely objects to the Award, the court will adopt the Award as the final judgment of the court. If a party timely objects to the special commissioners' Award, the court will hear the case in the same manner as other civil cases.

If you object to the Award and ask the court to hear the matter, you have the right to a trial by judge or jury. The allocation of costs is handled in the same manner as with the special commissioners' Award. After that trial, either party may appeal any judgment entered by the court.

Dismissal of the Condemnation Action

A condemning entity may file a motion to dismiss the condemnation proceeding if it decides it no longer needs your property. If the court grants the motion to dismiss, the case is over and you are entitled to recover reasonable and necessary fees for attorneys, appraisers, photographers, and for other expenses incurred to the date of the hearing on the motion to dismiss.

You may also file a motion to dismiss the condemnation proceeding on the ground that the condemning entity did not have the right to condemn the property, including a challenge as to whether the property is being taken for a public use. If the court grants your motion, the court may award you reasonable and necessary fees for attorneys, appraisers, photographers, and for other expenses incurred to the date of the hearing or judgment.

Relocation Costs

If you are displaced from a residence or place of business, you may be entitled to reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred while moving personal property from the residence or relocating the business to a new site. You are not entitled to these relocation costs if they are recoverable under another law. If you are entitled to these costs, they cannot exceed the market value of the property being moved and can only be reimbursed for moving distances within 50 miles.

Reclamation Options

If private property was condemned by a governmental entity, and the purpose for which the property was acquired is canceled before the 10th anniversary of the date of the acquisition, you may have the right to seek to repurchase the property for the fair market value of the property at the time the public use was canceled. This provision does not apply to property acquired by a county, a municipality, or the Texas Department of Transportation.

Disclaimer

The information in this statement is intended to be a summary of the applicable portions of Texas state law as required by HB 1495, enacted by the 80th Texas Legislature, Regular Session. This statement is not legal advice and is not a substitute for legal counsel.

Additional Resources

Further information regarding the procedures, timelines and requirements outlined in this document can be found in Chapter 21 of the Texas Property Code.