

Center for rowing, boathouse are urged by business leaders

By Peggy Vlerebome

American-Statesman Staff

As synchronized oarsmen from throughout the United States glide sculls and shells across Town Lake to practice for a regatta Saturday, downtown business leaders are trying to give rowing the kind of boost their counterparts did almost 100 years ago.

Business leaders want to give the Austin Rowing Club, sponsor of the Heart of Texas Regatta, a permanent boathouse and to create a rowing center.

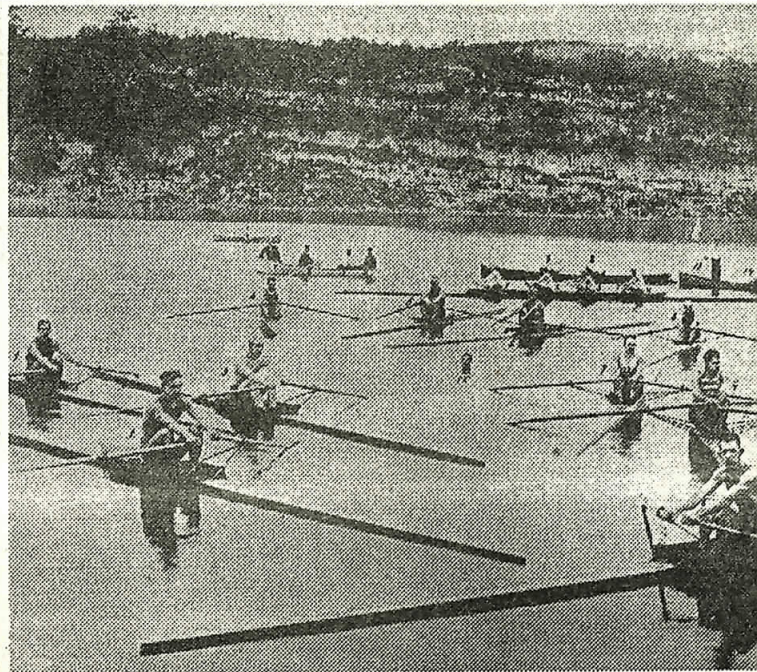
"THE MOST important thing I think we can do is find a home for Austin Rowing Club and the storage of boats," said lawyer Sander Shapiro, a member of Downtown Austin Partners, a business group.

"The biggest problem with use of Town Lake as a regional, national, and perhaps international center for rowing is the storage of boats," Shapiro said.

If boats, some as long as 65 feet, can be safely and properly stored, Austin would be more attractive for rowing events such as training for the Olympics, said Shapiro, who is on a rowing task force for the business group.

Shapiro said that a company planning a development near the Town Lake waterfront has expressed interest in a boathouse and perhaps even helping pay for it. City approval will be needed but has not been sought, Shapiro said.

The rowing club has had several temporary boathouses since it was formed in 1980.



Competitive rowing in Austin originated in the 19th century.

Austin business leaders in 1893 gave rowing, and Austin, a big boost when they organized a regatta with competitors from as far away as England and Australia to celebrate completion of a dam and hydroelectric power plant.

The 1893 regatta was on what is now Lake Austin. The regatta's start-up day will be on Town Lake east of Interstate 35. Heats every 15 minutes will begin at 8 a.m. Competitors are mostly collegiate rowing teams.