

LAKE: City should also limit boat activity, ex-parks board member says

Continued from B1

There are about two dozen trams along Lake Austin, and vertical walls line about half the shore. Landowners would not have to tear down those features, only get the city's permission if they want to make major changes to them or build new ones.

The city already requires permits for bulkheads but does not have clear enough design rules for them, said Andrew Clamann, an environmental scientist in the city's Watershed Protection Department.

Future walls would have to be stepped or sloped — less than a 45-degree angle — and be made of materials the city recommends to soften waves. The walls also couldn't add to a homeowner's property by extending their shoreline or filling in land that is currently under water.

Some who build and design bulkheads say the new types of walls and materials will cost more, be less effective and limit homeowners' access to the water.

Many lakeside homeowners, especially those on coves or inlets, don't have enough waterfront to fit slopes of rocks and plants, said Rusty Signor, a marine contractor who for 35 years has built bulkheads and docks along Lake Austin and other Texas lakes.

"This would disenfranchise them from having usable lakefront property," he said.

A vertical bulkhead creates a defined edge with sand and shore beside it, making it easy for people and boats to enter the water, said John McIntyre, a structural engineer who has designed bulkheads along Lake Austin for 20 years. Rocks stacked into a slope can be dangerous for people or boats, he said. They can also generate slippery algae, collect trash and serve as a haven for rodents and snakes, he said.

There are variations on vertical walls

that would work just as well without harming the shore's ecosystem, he said.

"There is not just one configuration of shoreline along Lake Austin. It varies from very steep to very shallow soils," McIntyre said. "We don't want to be confined into only doing a vegetated shoreline, or be hamstrung by artificial rules."

Mary Neely, a supporter of the changes and a member of the city's environmental board, said residents could still have docks or find other safe ways to enter the water.

This effort "is about the future of the lake. The shore is an area of important biological activity that we can't disregard," she said.

The vertical walls cost about \$200 per linear foot; the new designs and materials could cost at least \$350 per linear foot, Signor said. He also said there is also no proof that slopes made of rocks and plants are strong enough to repel the waves generated during busy boating days on the lake.

Sloped bulkheads "just don't work. They aren't going to mitigate waves to the degree that the city thinks they will, especially not when some boats throw three or four wakes," said Brian Bailey, who has owned a home on the lake for three years and built a new vertical bulkhead there.

Clamann said engineers would still have leeway to come up with innovative designs. The materials the city would require have a wide range of cost and have proved effective in other places, he said.

The aim of the changes is to "protect both the landowner and the environment," he said.

The city should also consider limiting the size, number or type of watercraft, which generate the waves that the walls are built to repel, said Clint Small, a former parks board member who led a committee that oversaw and reviewed issues related to the lake. Especially problematic

Have your say

The City Council will hold a public hearing and vote on new rules related to anti-erosion walls and trams along Lake Austin at 4 p.m. Oct. 28 at City Hall, 301 W. Second St. Anyone can sign up to speak.

are boats that owners weigh down to create big wakes for surfing and wakeboarding, he said.

Even though there are other causes of the erosion, Small said, "the city is putting all of the burden of fixing the problem on individual homeowners."

Several government agencies regulate different facets of Lake Austin. Some parks board members have expressed an interest in figuring out ways to better manage boating activity on the lake but haven't made any decisions about it.

Until now, the city has viewed trams as minor accessories to homes, and owners did not need city approval. But, as more are built, lake advocates and city officials worry that trams disturb soils, plants, groundwater pathways and rare birds along the lake's bluffs.

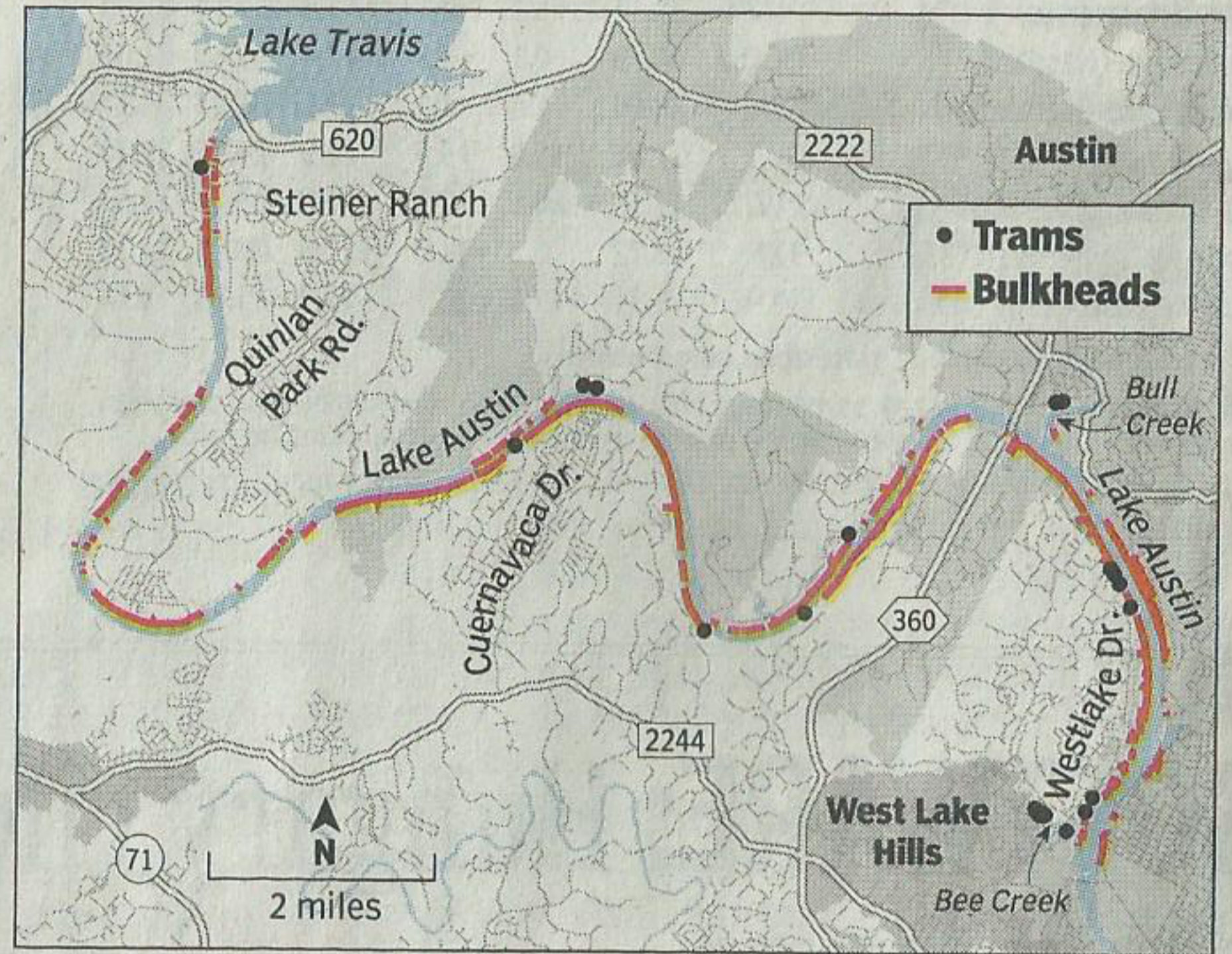
The city now wants to treat trams as major projects, such as boat docks, and require homeowners to submit detailed construction plans and get a permit to build one. Tram designs would have to preserve tree canopy and disturb as little animal and plant life as possible.

Some tram builders have said those rules aren't needed because modern tram designs are unobtrusive, traveling on tracks beneath tree canopies and a few inches away from the cliffside, so that they don't ruin plants, caves or other fragile features.

scoppola@statesman.com; 912-2939

Harm to Lake Austin?

City officials say they are concerned that trams and walls along the shore are marring the lake's ecology.



Environmentally friendly erosion control

Vertical bulkheads

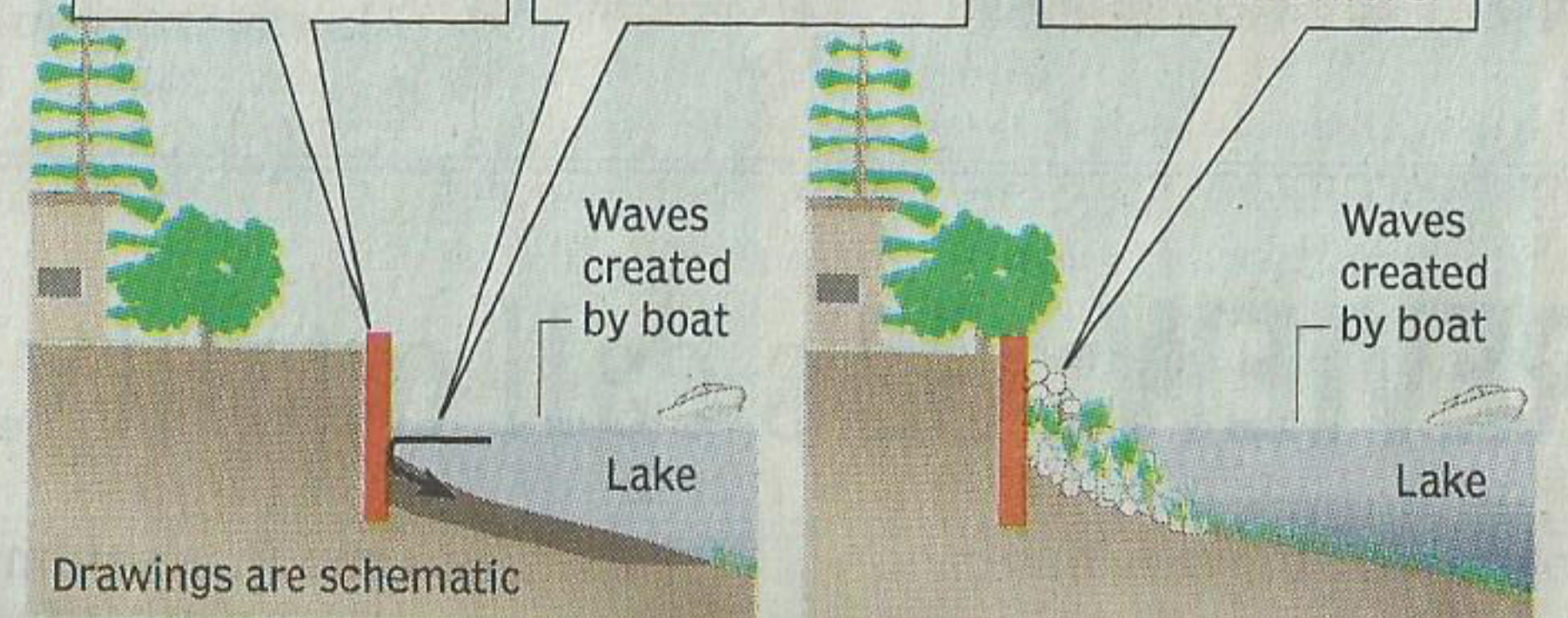
prevent erosion of lakefront land but might be causing problems of their own.

Waves from boats

forcefully repel off the bulkheads, eating away at shoreline plants, soils and animal habitats.

An alternative

would be sloped walls made of natural materials, such as rocks and plants. But they could cost more.



Source: City of Austin Watershed Protection Department

Robert Calzada AMERICAN-STATESMAN

TEXAS DIGEST

CONROE

Front-door killer sought by police

crews arrived, and the shooter had fled on foot, police said.

Police said a similar crime happened in the

shootings of two Houston cab drivers, killings that sent shock waves through the community and brought calls for extra protective mea-

EL PASO

Woman run over killed by own SUV