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Fed up with funeral-related violence, alderman proposes annexing Mount Hope Cemetery

“I’m reaching for anything to get control of the utter lawlessness that regularly occurs at the front door to that cemetery,” Ald. Matt O’Shea said.

By Fran Spielman And Frank Main Staff Reporters | Oct 2, 2020, 2:25pm CDT



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Ald. Matt O'Shea wants the city to annex Mount Hope Cemetery in an effort to better control funeral-related violence. | Sun-Times file

Southwest Side Ald. Matt O'Shea (19th) is fed up with having his Beverly and Morgan Park constituents pay the price for Mount Hope Cemetery being the burial ground of choice for gang members gunned down on the streets of Chicago.

Two days after a shooting at Mount Hope that was not gang-related, O'Shea proposed the legislative equivalent of the nuclear option: annexing the cemetery property into the city.

"I'm reaching for anything to get control of the utter lawlessness that regularly occurs at the front door to that cemetery. They are the busiest cemetery in the state of Illinois. But they have no traffic control plan," O'Shea told the Chicago Sun-Times on Friday.

"They have two points of entry, but they seldom use the second entry, which causes traffic backups for hours at a time. ... Today between 12 and 2 p.m., they have 12 scheduled funeral processions. ... Multiple homicide victims from gang shootings. These types of events routinely cause very dangerous bottlenecks. ... Bringing them under the city's jurisdiction will allow for some commonsense regulation."

O'Shea acknowledged only the state can regulate what goes on inside cemeteries. But he argued annexation would empower the city to restore order outside.

"For far too long, we've had these episodes of shootings and pursuits in and out of cemeteries. Rival gangs settling their disputes in a funeral procession. My community's been under siege," he said.

Scott Troost, president of Mount Hope Cemetery, refused to comment on the annexation proposal.

But he called Wednesday's shooting an "isolated incident" that cemetery officials "sincerely regret."

"We're fully cooperating with authorities to make sure that anyone traveling to our cemetery and our staff continue to be safe," Troost said.

O'Shea called annexation a "last resort" that followed "years of failed efforts" to mitigate funeral-related violence.

Among those efforts:

- A decision by the Chicago Police Department to treat gang funerals as "gang events" — with pat-downs and police surveillance. A police helicopter was put on standby to escort one funeral procession to the cemetery and look for illegal activity.
- Adding reckless driving during a funeral procession to the laundry list of offenses punishable by vehicle impoundment.
- Private security and traffic management hired and paid for by Mount Hope to work both inside and outside the cemetery. O'Shea said the plan worked until traffic management personnel on the street were eliminated, with private security confined to inside the property.

"The presence of a security professional directing traffic on Wednesday could have prevented this incident," he wrote.

- A coordinated response by CPD, the Cook County Sheriff's office and suburban police departments.

The routes to and from Mount Hope run through Beverly and Morgan Park, meaning O'Shea's constituents must endure an array of intimidating behavior and gang shootings. People in processions flash gang signs, run red lights and drive into oncoming traffic. There have been high-speed chases on side streets, arguments among motorists and windows shot out.

O'Shea said the shooting Wednesday was triggered by road rage in the 2700 block of 115th Street.

Two funeral processions for senior citizens were approaching Mount Hope when a confrontation occurred between a vehicle "blocking traffic to allow the procession to enter the cemetery and a second vehicle trying to cut through the procession," O'Shea

wrote in an email to his constituents.

When entry was denied, someone in a black Dodge Challenger pulled out a gun and opened fire. A 53-year-old man was wounded, and two other people, including a child, were injured by shattered glass.

“At one of my local grammar schools, the principal called me this morning and said, ‘Should I cut school short today? ... Are the kids gonna be safe walking home from school?’ It’s inexcusable,” O’Shea said.

The Chicago Police Department has watched for outbreaks of violence at gang funerals for years.

In July, **14 people were wounded in a shooting** outside Rhodes Funeral Services in Gresham as they left a funeral for a man shot and killed a week earlier.

A car pulled up and gunmen fired at funeral-goers; some were carrying guns and shot back. Police said a squad car assigned to guard the funeral home was parked outside when the gunfire began.

In 2012, a 21-year-old man was shot to death and another man was critically wounded in a shooting outside St. Columbanus Catholic Church across the street from A.A. Rayner & Sons Funeral Home on the South Side.

Hundreds of mourners were leaving the church and scrambled for cover during the shootings. At the time, then-police Supt. Garry McCarthy said funerals for gang members were “out of control” and ordered increased surveillance of them.

But gunfire at funerals and funeral processions has gone on for decades in Chicago. In 2004, a cortege for a murdered Latin Kings member even stopped to let someone in the procession shoot a rival gang member on the street, according to the police.

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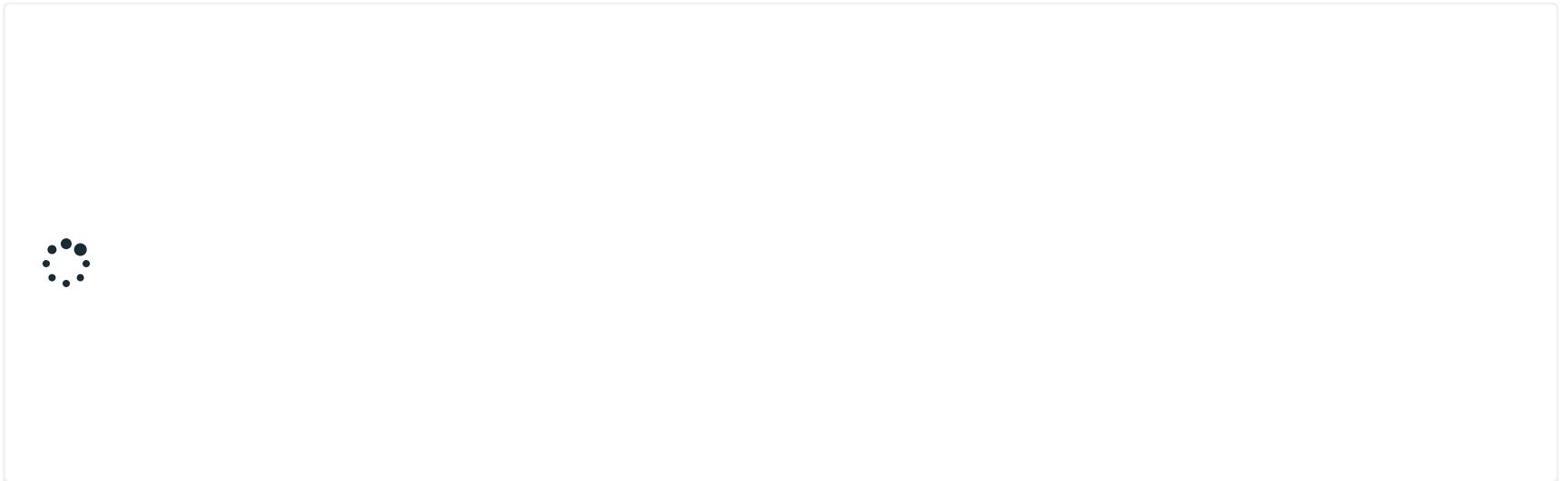
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By Miriam Di Nunzio | May 9, 2022, 12:05pm CDT

WHITE SOX

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CRIME

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BEARS

Bears cut Ledarius Mack, sign six undrafted rookies

Mack, the brother of former Bears linebacker Khalil Mack, played in three games last season. The six players who were signed participated in last weekend’s rookie minicamp on a tryout basis.

By Mark Potash | May 9, 2022, 11:07am CDT

UKRAINE

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The first ladies met at a school being used to temporarily house Ukrainian migrants.

By Associated Press | May 9, 2022, 11:04am CDT

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