

ADVERTISEMENT



DAILY SOUTHTOWN

# Kadner: Alderman gets tough on squatters, judge

By Phil Kadner  
Chicago Tribune • Jul 21, 2015 at 9:07 pm

Expand



FEEDBACK

Subscribers, get Chicago's top newsletter

Sign up for Daywatch





## Loading your audio article

Chicago Ald. Matt O'Shea, 19th, is still fuming over a decision by a Cook County judge to release two men accused of masterminding a plot to illegally occupy more than a dozen homes in the Beverly and Morgan Park communities.

The men were arrested following a 10-month investigation by Chicago police spearheaded by the alderman's office. They are charged with felony theft, burglary and financial institution fraud and now are back in Cook County Jail awaiting trial after violating the terms of their release.

ADVERTISEMENT

But nearly three weeks after a hearing before Circuit Court Judge James Brown, O'Shea remains outraged that Brown reduced another judge's recommendation for \$500,000 bail on each man and instead released them with a recommendation for electronic monitoring and without having to post a cash bond.

To understand the reason for O'Shea's fury, you ought to know that nearly two years ago he began receiving calls from ward residents that strange people appeared to be moving into houses, usually under foreclosure.

You also need to know something about the sovereign citizen movement, a disorganized effort to thwart government laws that protect property rights in the United States. Its adherents believe, for a variety of reasons, that U.S. laws do not apply to them.

The FBI considers the movement a domestic terrorist threat, and Chicago police I spoke with said its criminal actions may one day replace identity theft as the most costly crime in America. Yet

there apparently is no central headquarters for the sovereign citizens movement.

Its anti-government philosophy, along with a series of actions repeated throughout the country, seem to be handed down through the Internet or by word of mouth, often getting mangled in the translation.

In this instance, the two men in Cook County Jail — Torrez Moore, 55, and David Farr (also known as Fahim Ali), 40 — along with Raymond Trimble, 52, and his son Arshad Thomas, 26, allegedly arranged to occupy with squatters 14 vacant houses throughout Chicago, according to State's Attorney Anita Alvarez.

This was usually done by filing something called an "application of adverse possession" with the Cook County recorder of deeds, according to officers in the Chicago Police Department's financial crimes unit.

Under state law, the county recorder must accept all written applications for liens and other title requests for property. The theory is that all conflicting claims will eventually be sorted out in court by a judge.

Under normal circumstances, an application for adverse possession might be filed, for example, by a son who has lived in his parents' house for a number of years and paid the mortgage, utility bills and made repairs but never had his name added to the title.

The parents die, and he wants to legally establish that the house belongs to him. If he can prove his claim in court, that he has lived there and maintained the property for 10 years, he may get title to the house.

But that's not the point when squatters try to take possession of a property. They want a piece of paper, issued by the recorder's office, that seems to indicate they have some claim to the property.

So when police show up and question their legal right to live there, they hand over the document, and police will often let them remain.

These sovereign squatters, by the way, often don't select a cheap property to live in.

One home in Beverly, in the 9700 block of Damen Avenue, has a sale price of \$414,900. It's listed at 2,742 square feet, with three bedrooms, three baths and a lot size of 8,716 square feet.

But back to O'Shea and his role in the story. After he and the Beverly Area Planning Association, the largest civic group in the area, fielded numerous calls from nervous residents about people

moving into houses that were abandoned, O'Shea contacted police at Morgan Park's 22nd District station.

They in turn contacted the police financial crimes unit. And O'Shea and Chicago police got the FBI involved, as well as the county recorder's and state's attorney's offices.

"We had everyone involved because traditionally what has happened is that these types of people get charged with a misdemeanor, and before you know it, they're back in your community," O'Shea said. "We wanted to get them charged with a felony. We wanted to take our time and put a really good case together and make sure these people were locked up for a long time."

You may be wondering at this point how the "squatters" get into the abandoned houses. That remains something of a mystery, although law enforcement officials have some educated guesses.

In some cases, they simply kick in a door and then change the locks. In other cases, they seem to have keys, although no one knows where they get the keys.

While Moore and Farr seemed to occupy two of the houses, police believe they "rented" out some of the others, although they said Moore claimed the fees were donations made to him to advance his philosophy.

Police also told me that Moore ran classes for people to spread the theory of sovereign citizenship.

"What you had here were citizens working with their local government officials, their local police, the state's attorney and everyone else you are supposed to work with to correct something that has gone dreadfully wrong and threatens the community," said Margot Holland, executive director of the Beverly Area Planning Association. "We were very proud of how everyone worked together, and we kept telling residents to be patient and the issue would be addressed."

"But on the very day they see police and the FBI and the state's attorney raiding all these buildings in the neighborhood, they watch the TV news and find out that the two ringleaders have walked away," O'Shea said. "There were people afraid that that night these people were all going to be moving back into their neighborhoods."

That didn't happen, O'Shea admits, but the fear was real and unnecessary.

I should add that no law enforcement official I spoke with nor O'Shea could point to any physical violence or threats of violence by those charged.



## Daily Southtown

Twice-weekly

News updates from the south suburbs delivered every Monday and Wednesday

ENTER YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS



But they were referred to repeatedly as "paper terrorists" because members of the sovereign citizen movement have been known to file property liens and other legal paperwork against police officers who try to evict them, neighbors who complain about them and prosecutors who bring charges against them. I am told they always act as their own attorneys, although they rarely have legal degrees.

"These guys did knock on neighbors' doors when I started getting law enforcement involved, and they would ask people why they were complaining to the alderman," O'Shea said. "That's a form of intimidation. People told me they were frightened by that."

The squatters also posted "no trespassing" signs in windows and doors of the houses, another indication to local residents that these people were not your normal neighbors. Police say the posting of "no trespassing" signs is a good indicator that people who have recently moved into a house may belong to the sovereign citizen movement.

"They claim they don't believe that banks can own homes, and most of these homes are in foreclosure and owned by a bank," one police investigator told me. "They would tell you that under the U.S. Constitution and the laws of the state, a bank can't own property. But when you ask for a specific citation, they're usually very evasive."

Police estimate that this group may have occupied as many as 60 houses in the Chicago area, including some in the suburbs.

"At some point Judge Brown is going to run for retention, and I am going to remind people of what he did," O'Shea said. "Maybe he was under pressure to keep the Cook County Jail population down, I don't know. But he made a mistake here. A big mistake."

[pkadner@tribpub.com](mailto:pkadner@tribpub.com)



Copyright © 2021, Chicago Tribune

---

---

[Help Center](#)