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### **Crime drives venture capital firm from city**

#### **Dixon thinks other reasons led to move to county**

By Peter Hermann

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Executives of a venture capital company that has been a mainstay in Baltimore's Mid-Town neighborhood for a quarter-century told the mayor they are moving to the suburbs because their employees no longer feel safe in the city, an economic blow that demonstrates the far-reaching impact crime can have on a neighborhood.

The announcement from Louis Citron, the general counsel of New Enterprise Associates on St. Paul Street, which has offices in Chevy Chase, California, China and India, came in the form of an e-mail Thursday night to Mayor Sheila Dixon and three members of the City Council.

"At this point, our decision is set and cannot be reversed," Citron wrote.

In an interview, the attorney said executives signed a long-term lease in Timonium and expect to move their 35 employees in mid-December. He estimated the move would cost the city \$200,000 a year in revenue from parking fees, lunches, outings to the Maryland Club and cleaning services.

"We had people held up at gunpoint," Citron said. "A number of us have had our cars broken into, and it's very expensive to get them repaired." In the e-mail, he noted that the "recent local beatings by roving teenagers during the day in this neighborhood, the raucous club in the basement of the Belvedere and other gang violence throughout the city" were factors in the company's decision.

Dixon told TheBaltimore Sun that she doubts the company left solely because of crime and that she wished the executives had discussed their intentions with her staff before making a final decision. "There's more to it than that," the mayor said. "We don't want to see any business leaving."

The news comes at a time when Dixon and her police commissioner are trying to assure residents they are safe and that crime is down substantially in the downtown area even as a rash of attacks from Federal Hill to Bolton Hill have created fear in upscale neighborhoods and tourist districts.

On Tuesday, a 33-year-old man who works at the Peabody Institute was attacked on Madison Street about 5:30 p.m. by a group of teens, one of whom hit him in the face with a brick. The

man escaped another hit by a teen armed with a metal pipe and ran to find a police officer, who arrested a 17-year-old.

A police spokesman said the teen was charged as a juvenile with assault, drawing anger from City Councilman William H. Cole IV, who has railed about downtown crime. "I'm sorry, that is not a juvenile crime," he said, noting the May 23 weekend in which he said kids ran up and down Mount Vernon streets "overturning everything that wasn't nailed down. It's behavior that defies all logic and sensibility."

Cole added: "I still believe that when you look at the big picture, the neighborhood is safe. Is it as safe as it could be? The answer is no. ... The thing that scares me is the random acts that are happening right now."

Privately, the mayor's office remains skeptical of New Enterprise officials, saying their decision to leave must have predated the recent violence and that they may now be using it as a convenient excuse. The officials complained they were blindsided by the nighttime e-mail and haven't had time to fully investigate.

Frona Cohen, the director of marketing and communications for the Baltimore County Department of Economic Development, said she has never heard of a company moving because of crime. She said her office does not track why businesses relocate, but she said the movements between the county and the city happen routinely and in both directions.

"If a city business is looking for a different location, wherever it might be, we certainly welcome it to the county," Cohen said. "But we make sure that the Baltimore Development Corporation and the city are aware that they might be losing a business and some jobs. We want to give them every opportunity to keep jobs in the city."

Citron, who lives in Roland Park, also threatened to sell his home, assessed at a half-million dollars. He said the company's actions were an "accumulation of events over the years. ... We feel bad about this, except that you have to worry about your employees' safety. A large number of us work and live here in the city, and we care about the city. That's why we sent the letter."

Citron ended his e-mail to the mayor: "We wish you and the city only the best of luck in addressing these issues and hope that you are successful. It is in no one's interest to see Baltimore be viewed by the nation as a crime ridden and violent city that is totally out of control."