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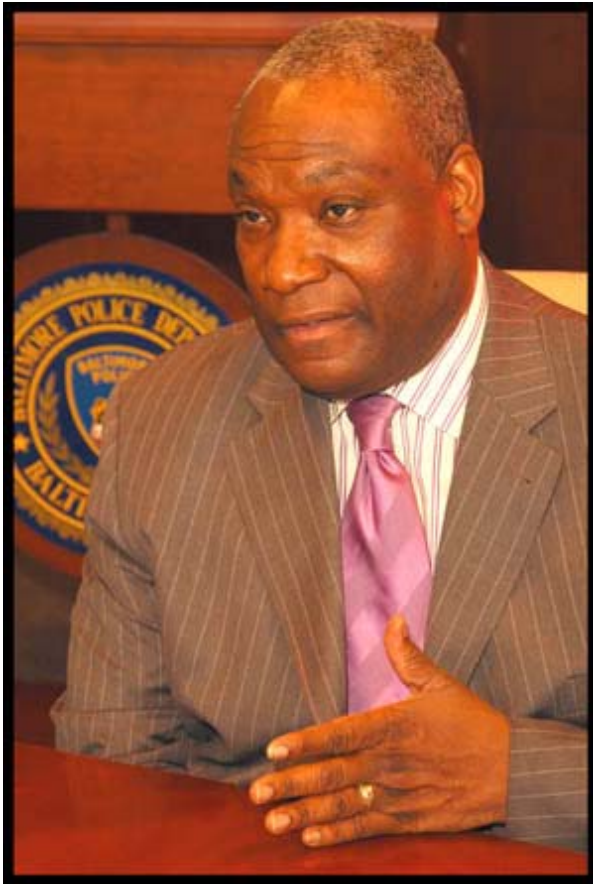
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## FEATURE

# Brass Tacks

An Interview With Police Commissioner Leonard Hamm

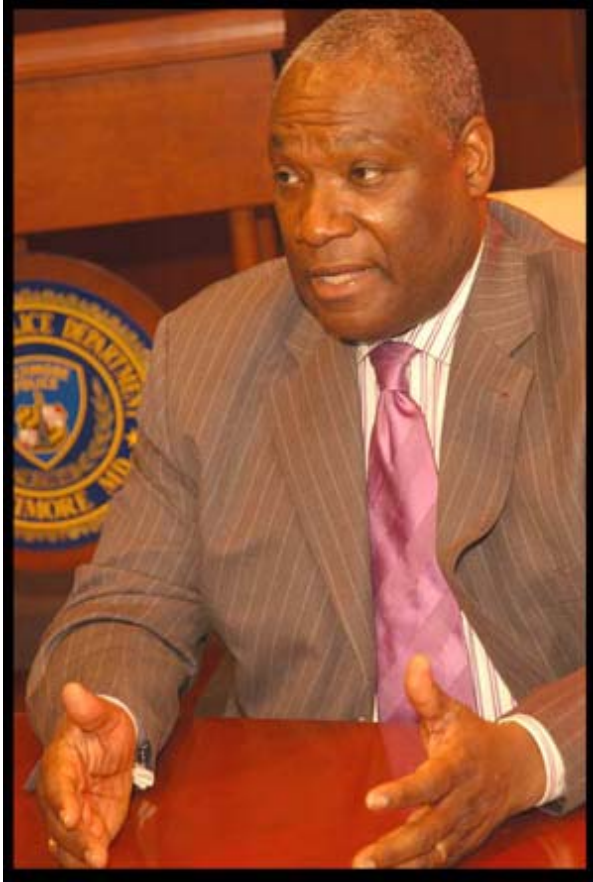
by Anna Ditkoff



PHOTOS BY JEFFERSON JACKSON STEELE

**THE JOB OF POLICE COMMISSIONER** isn't an easy one, especially in Baltimore, a city with seemingly uncontrollable crime rates and a police department dogged by internal strife and tensions with the community it serves. After a decade of looking outside the city for its top cop, Baltimore leaders warmly welcomed Leonard Hamm to the position in 2004. The consensus seemed to be, *Finally, a hometown boy.*

Hamm grew up in Cherry Hill, a neighborhood known primarily for its crime and poverty. He attended City College High School, where he was captain of its undefeated basketball team. He went to college at Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, and in 1974 he joined the Baltimore Police Department. For the next 20 years, he served as a beat cop in Reservoir Hill, worked in the Western District and the Inner Harbor, and held posts on the SWAT team, in criminal intelligence, and at the police academy.



He first came into the public eye after Thomas Frazier became Baltimore's police commissioner in 1994, brought to town from San Jose, Calif., by then-Mayor Kurt Schmoke to reform a broken department and bring down 1993's record-high homicide total of 353. Frazier promoted Hamm from lieutenant to major and made him the first African-American Central District commander. Hamm led a series of high-profile raids on drug corners in the district before retiring from the force two years later.

He went on to work for the Downtown Partnership, followed by stints as the chief of the Baltimore City Public School System's police force (a separate entity from the city police), and as the head of Morgan State University's police. In August 2004, he returned to the Baltimore Police Department as then-Commissioner Kevin Clark's No. 2 man. At the time, Clark was under investigation for a domestic violence complaint, but Hamm swore at a press conference that he was there to help Clark, not replace him, by giving the New York transplant a local perspective.

When Clark was fired three months later, Mayor Martin O'Malley named Hamm acting commissioner. While there was some debate over whether or not Clark should have been ousted--Clark filed suit against the city--and plenty of hoopla over O'Malley being forced to name his fourth police commissioner in as many years (Ron Daniel stepped down after 57 days in March 2000, and Ed Norris left for the Maryland State Police at the end of 2002), the response to Hamm's appointment was overwhelmingly positive. Questions were raised about Hamm putting false information in a bankruptcy claim, but despite promising tougher review processes for police commissioner, City Council members seemed unconcerned. In a March 4, 2005, *Sun* column, Michael Olesker described Hamm's confirmation hearing as "closer to a coronation," with council members asking questions such as "Do

you think this glass is half full, or half empty?" and "Will you be a man of your word?" and granting a unanimous vote of support.

Still, problems have persisted during Hamm's tenure. His official confirmation as police commissioner was only two weeks old when he came under fire for a performance evaluation system based on the number of arrests and citations officers doled out, with the lowest-performing officers getting transferred. It caused police union officials and City Council members who had so recently supported Hamm to cry "quotas." The Baltimore State's Attorney's Office refused to prosecute many of the resulting "quality of life" arrests, and critics argued that the arrests were gumming up the legal system and exacerbating overcrowding at Central Booking. At a January 2006 hearing before the state legislature, Hamm was forced to talk over boos. People who not long ago were hailing the new commissioner as the second coming started referring to him and O'Malley as bullies.

Since Hamm started leading the force, several class action suits have been filed against the department, including one claiming that the BPD was making illegal arrests, and another on behalf of injured and disabled officers who say they were forced to retire. There have been allegations of officer misconduct including rape, drug dealing, and excessive force. In early 2006 allegations of unreported crimes, along with differences between the BPD's and the medical examiner's homicide numbers, led to questions about the veracity of the department's crime statistics. And most recently, the department came under fire for carting a 7-year-old boy away in handcuffs. As commissioner, Hamm was supposed to heal the misgivings between police and the community, but the rift appears to be bigger than ever.

While problems in the department have persisted, so has crime. The murder rate dropped slightly when Hamm took the reins, going from 278 in 2004 to 269 in '05 before rebounding to 275 in '06. And there were 92 murders in the first four months of 2007, putting the city on track to meet or exceed last year's numbers.

How this trend will be stopped is still unclear. Hamm published a 10-page crime plan in January 2005 while acting commissioner that is still on the BPD web site labeled "Police Commissioner's Crime Plan," despite the fact that he admits to having since abandoned it.

Hamm's department has tried a variety of different programs to curb crime, including mini-districts, gun buybacks, crime cameras, foot patrols, Safe Zones, the return of city, state, and local law enforcement partnerships in the form of Project Exile, and a marriage of social services with policing under Operation Safe Streets. Police have handed out cards and DVDs meant to dissuade crime. Now they are putting up billboards touting lengthy sentences recently handed down in gun-possession cases under Project Exile. And since Sheila Dixon became mayor, she and Hamm have pledged to bring crime down through community policing, a vaguely articulated concept that was also used by Frazier during a period when the annual homicide rate stayed above 300.

The police department has claimed some successes. A March 24 *Sun* article reported that police said robberies were down 19 percent compared to the same time last year and felony aggravated assaults were down 21 percent. Police also pointed to a 25 percent decline in arrests that didn't lead to charges. Homicides and nonfatal shootings are both on the rise, however, and questions remain as to whether or not Hamm, for all his promise and projects, has a clear plan for stemming the tide.

*City Paper* recently sat down with Hamm in a conference room at BPD headquarters (with the force's chief spokesman, Matt Jablow, at his side) to discuss crime in Baltimore City, his strategies for getting

it under control, and some of the problems that have plagued the department. A tall and imposing figure, Hamm spent an hour responding to questions on a wide range of topics, giving his answers in a gravelly bass tone. His face and manner remained impassive throughout.

**City Paper:** *What made you decide to come back to the police department?*

**Leonard Hamm:** I was asked by then-Mayor O'Malley to be the deputy commissioner of the operations bureau. I decided to come back based on him asking me to come back.

**CP:** *Was there something in particular you were hoping to accomplish?*

**LH:** We had a police department that I thought, as a citizen and as an ex-police official, had kind of lost its way, had kind of lost its mission, and a police department that was not designed to do the job that it was intended to do--protect the citizens of Baltimore City.

**CP:** *What were the biggest issues you faced when you took over as police commissioner?*

**LH:** I think it was a demoralized police department. We had police officers and police officials who had been friends, comrades, 20 years no longer speaking to each other, suspicious of each other. We had about four different police departments in one. The uniforms weren't talking to the suits and the suits weren't talking to the uniforms, so the first thing that had to happen for me, and for us, to be successful, I had to pull together a team of people who believed in my mission, who had faith in what we were trying to do, who were hard workers, who were honest, going to tell the truth and give an honest effort. I think we did that. And then we had to come up with a plan of action as to how we were going to deal with the violence in this city. How we were going to deal with getting back to best practices that we had lost as a police department, and we worked very hard to do that. The police department of 2007 is a very different one than we had in 2003.

**CP:** *How is your approach different from previous police commissioners?*

**LH:** I'm born and raised here. I understand the significance of a City-Poly game. I understand that the things that you do on the west side of town may not necessarily be successful on the east side of town. I know who the players are, I know who the pretenders are, I know who the powerbrokers are, so it didn't take me two years or three years to have a learning curve about this town. That gave me an advantage.

**CP:** *How is policing in Baltimore different today than it was when you came up through the ranks?*

**LH:** Society is different. We didn't have identity theft, for example. We didn't have the threat of terrorism. But as society changes . . . we have to change, and the department has to change what it does and how it does things. Technology and information has just, I mean, it's just something that we never even thought about when I was pushing a patrol car. So all these technological changes have changed how we do business.

**CP:** *For the better or for the worse?*

**LH:** It's just different.

**CP:** *Do you think the nature of street crime is different than it was then?*

**LH:** I think that street crime is different, and more prevalent, because families have changed. Families have deteriorated. Those institutions that traditionally held crime in check--and not law enforcement, it was education, families, the church--those institutions are beginning to become unfocused on what it is they're supposed to be doing. And when you have institutions that normally stabilize a community become unfocused, you're going to have some of the stuff that you see now.

**City Paper:** *In 2005 you laid out a plan for fighting crime in the city. How has your agenda changed since then?*

**Leonard Hamm:** What's happened is that in 2005 we talked about mini-districts. Basically, we went into areas that were historically causing us all kinds of problems, and we had to solidify those areas because they were the cause of a lot of violence, an inordinate amount of violence in the city, shootings, homicides. What we found, though, is that that's extremely expensive to flood an area with a bunch of people, to try to control an area, and all you're doing is just pushing it someplace else. And it's the same people who were in this area, now they're in that area.

So what we do now is proactive target enforcement, and what that means is we use technology, we use information, and we go after the people who are causing problems in this city, because as you put pressure on one part of the city, they'll just relocate in another part of the city. So we don't deal with geography anymore, we deal with people. We follow them wherever they go, and we hound them and hound them and hound them, with the help of our federal partners and our state partners, until they are arrested, until they are taken out of the community. Then what we do is we work on the second piece of it, and that's giving a community hope and trying to change the value system of the community by bringing in services and helping people get their lives back together.

**CP:** *You initially supported arrests for minor offenses, but later strove to reduce them amid complaints that those arrests clogged the system and did not lead to prosecutions. What made you change your stance on arrests for "quality of life" crimes?*

**LH:** I haven't changed it. We still solve problems and enforce the law, and I've always said that police officers have many tools in their arsenal to solve problems. Arrest is just one of them. What I want my officers to do, which is what they're doing, is solving problems in the community. If, in fact, you have a situation where people are urinating on people's steps or people are hanging out on people's steps, [officers] ought to do something about that. They're going to address that however you choose to do that as a police officer, whether you do it with criminal citations, whether you use civil citations, or whether you ask people to comply.

What's happening now in the streets is that people understand that certain behavior is unacceptable, so that when we as police officers come and ask people, "Would you please stop? Would you please move on?" they're doing that now more so than they've ever done before.

**CP:** *How does Mayor Sheila Dixon's crime-fighting policy differ from Martin O'Malley's?*

**LH:** Mayor Dixon has a holistic view of fighting crime. Mayor Dixon wants to get to the root of crime. The roots of crime are normally economical, educational, health, and housing issues. She wants to solve those problems, because she understands that you still need to enforce and you have to enforce, but you have to do these other things, too, if you want to keep crime out. Mayor O'Malley was very heavy on enforcement, because it was needed at the time, because the streets were just out of control. So you have to have the heavy enforcement first to get people to understand what's acceptable and not acceptable, and then you have to come back and do the other piece. So, to me, it's just an extension. What Mayor Dixon is doing is just an extension of what Mayor O'Malley started.

**CP:** *There has been a lot of talk about community policing. What exactly is community policing?*

**LH:** Community policing is simply police and law-abiding citizens working together to arrest offenders, solve problems, and enhance the quality of life in communities. That's it. Whatever kind of programs you want to build around that theme, then you do, but that's basically what it is.

**CP:** *How is it different from the crime-fighting philosophy of the Schmoke administration, which saw record-high homicide rates?*

**LH:** The basic difference is community policing admits that police need community help to solve problems. Police officers and police administrations are simply saying, in community policing, "We cannot do it alone, we can't arrest our way out of this situation." Prior to community policing, police thought that . . . *This is ours, we can handle it, we can do it.* That's not the case. It's not the case. Ultimately, it's with the help of community that you solve problems in the community.

**CP:** *You have started a foot-patrol program where new officers walk a beat for six weeks. What do you hope to accomplish?*

**LH:** Well, two things. First of all, what it'll do is, it'll have these police officers who are walking foot understand and get a feel for the community. They'll understand these communities, and they'll understand that basically you can change the communities, but people want the same things. People want to be safe, people want to be protected, and people want to know their police officers, so they'll get a newfound respect for people, and they'll find out a lot about themselves, because people will help them find out a lot about themselves. So then after that six weeks, we put them in a patrol car and they have a healthy balance of what policing is all about.

**CP:** *Do they stay in the same neighborhood?*

**LH:** It depends. We can move them around if we see fit, depending on the need.

**CP:** *Do you feel that six weeks is long enough for them to really get a sense of the neighborhood?*

**LH:** Six weeks is a good amount of time for them to do it, and then what we want them to do, and what they will do, is continue that as they push that patrol car. They'll park it for an hour and get out and walk the areas. One of the hardest things that young police officers have to do once they graduate from the academy, believe it or not, is to walk up to a citizen say, "Good morning, I'm Officer Smith. I work this area and you can call on me."

**City Paper:** *In the last few years the gang problem has exploded in Baltimore. How do you plan to combat gangs?*

**Leonard Hamm:** You address gangs two different ways. First of all, you have to identify them--who they are, what they're doing, where they're located, what they're about--and we've done that. Part of that identification is identifying who are your hard-core leaders, their organizational charts, and who are young people who are just misguided and looking for something to do and somebody to lead them and somebody to gather them in. What we have done is we have identified all those hard-core people. We know who they are. Then you have to do your enforcement piece. Dismantle them, [the] hard-core people, arrest them, or whatever it is you do. Now the second piece of that is once you've taken these leaders out and taken them out of the community, what are you going to do with all of these young people who look to these leaders for guidance and nurturing and money and support? That's when your city fathers and all these city agencies have to step up, parents and politicians and business folk and the clergy, to provide that need that was taken away.

**CP:** *You implemented the Get Out of the Game program. What is that exactly?*

**LH:** That's part of the healing process where we try to help communities heal, because some people came to me and said, "Commissioner, I'm tired of living the way that I'm living, I'd like to get out of the game." When one guy said that to me, I just kind of heard it, put it in the back of my mind, but more and more people were coming up to me saying that. And basically, what it is, is it's my police officers who are out there on the street 24 hours a day--we're the only service that's out there 24 hours a day--who see the other side of life, the underbelly of life, and these are potential clients. We have many profits and nonprofits who are doing great work, but they close at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Our clients come out maybe at 3 o'clock in the morning, so our guys who work Get Out of the Game act as a conduit for clients and the vendors and put them together to help people turn their lives around, whether it's a job, whether it's drug treatment, whether it's GED training. We try to do that one person at the time.

**CP:** *How effective do you think it has been?*

**LH:** If we change one life, then we have been effective, because I understand how much one life on a destructive end can mean. We had one young man in 2005 kill three people inside of an hour. Now that's four families that are ruined by one person for about six generations. So that's the destructive power of one. I look for the constructive power of one, and if we just get one, that's one that we don't have to worry about for maybe six generations.

**CP:** *You've also instituted a Safe Zones program. Can you explain what that is?*

**LH:** Safe Zone is an idea that one of my officers came up with in addressing challenging areas. What we found out, and what we knew as police officers, is that outsiders were coming to a community to buy drugs using vehicles and driving out. And our response to that has been to do investigations, get warrants, knock on doors, and all that. So one of my officers, Lt. Col. John Skinner, came up with the idea, "Why don't we just redirect vehicular traffic out of an area and don't let them come in and see what happens?" So I said, "That's a good idea, try it." So he mapped out an area in the Western District, when he was commander of the Western District, which was problematic for him, and he got backing from the community. "This is what we want to do. We want to block off this area. People who don't live here, we don't want them to come in. People who live here, we'll allow them to come in."

And for four weeks he did heavy enforcement. All of those people in that area who were causing problems, they arrested them. Once the area was solidified, then we brought in city services, because we found out that people were afraid to come out of their houses to get services, whether it's social services or any kind of training. So we, with our partners, we brought them into the Safe Zone. And they actually went knocking on doors and people found out that, hey, someone cares about me. Public Works came in and boarded up vacant buildings and cleared fields and cleared out trash and got rid of graffiti and all of that, and people started having hope and started taking pride in their communities. And every place that we've gone we have been able to sustain that decrease in crime with minimal police officers.

*[Police have implemented Safe Zones in Park Heights in 2006 and 2007; so far this year it is tied with Broadway East for the most murderous neighborhood in the city.]*

**City Paper:** *The city has recently reinstated multiagency partnerships between city, state, and federal law enforcement agencies with Project Exile and Operation Safe Streets. What do these programs do?*

**Leonard Hamm:** We share resources. I mean, the law enforcement dollar is shrinking. The federal government is cutting back on everything. We don't have the money that we had, once upon a time, as a police agency, so all of these law enforcement agencies, who have the same purpose, have the same mission, that's to get the bad guy off the street, we decided to put our egos at the door, come together, and work as one. Share resources to solve the same problem, get to the same end, get the bad guy off the street.

**CP:** *How is Project Exile different than Operation Safe Streets?*

**LH:** Project Exile, the basic difference to me is that when you're part of the Exile program, you are sent a long, long way. That's what Exile means--it's going to take three or four buses for your family members to come and see you. You're not sent away in any prison in Maryland. You're sent away in Colorado, Terre Haute [a maximum-security prison in Indiana], and it's going to take a long ride for your family members to see you.

**Matt Jablow:** And no parole in the federal system.

**LH:** Right, no parole.

**CP:** *And Operation Safe Streets?*

**LH:** Well, it's basically the same thing, but, you know, it's state-sponsored, and you know, even though we get convictions, a person still is sent to a relatively close prison and there's still the parole factor and all that stuff in to it.

*[According to a February 2007 press release from the Mayor's Office, Operation Safe Streets is a program in which law enforcement "works with community-based organizations to develop and implement strategies to reduce and prevent violence, particularly shootings and killings. The model relies on outreach workers, faith leaders, and other community leaders to intervene in conflicts, or*

*potential conflicts, and promote alternatives to violence. Along with cooperation from police, (Operation Safe Streets) includes a strong public education campaign to provide the message that shootings and violence are not acceptable."]*

**CP:** *How effective are programs like Project Exile?*

**LH:** They're extremely effective. I mean, anytime you can take somebody off the street [for a lesser charge] who you know, as a law enforcement officer, has killed six people, but for whatever reason you can't prove it, you're going to be successful. You're going to be successful when you show signs that this person is no longer a part of the neighborhood. The fear factor is gone, and that so-called great Robin Hood has fallen. He's no longer this legendary person that he once was, so it's extremely effective. Not only from a law enforcement standpoint, but for a psychological standpoint for the neighborhood.

**CP:** *One aspect of the program is offender call-ins, where violent offenders are addressed directly and told to stop participating in the violence or they will face consequences. How effective are these call-ins?*

**LH:** When we call the offenders in, they don't fall asleep, and they pay attention. And I will tell you that we had one in the Southern District in December of 2006, because of some things that were going on in Cherry Hill, and, knock on wood, since this date we haven't had one shooting, one homicide in Cherry Hill, where last year, in 2006, we had 40 shootings and 10 murders in Cherry Hill.

*[There was a murder in Cherry Hill on April 19, five days after this interview took place.]*

**CP:** *Programs similar to Project Exile have been effective in other cities like Boston and Richmond, Va., but have failed to take hold here in the past. One major issue has been a lack of cooperation between the police and the State's Attorney's Office. What would need to happen for those agencies to work effectively together?*

**LH:** Individual people who run those agencies have to establish relationships. It's all about relationships. It's all about me sitting across the table from you, and do I trust you. It's all about me making policies in the police department and understanding that everything I do impacts on everything you do.

**CP:** *And how's your relationship with Baltimore State's Attorney Patricia Jessamy?*

**LH:** My relationship with the state's attorney is fine.

**City Paper:** *How helpful do you find Comstat, the city's crime-statistics tracking program?*

**Leonard Hamm:** Comstat is a very important tool in our proactively targeting trends of crime and who's doing crime. I don't think that a police agency can really get along without some form of it. Comstat is proactive. It's not reactive. Utilizing Comstat, we can find out where the trends are, who we're looking for. And also, what it does, it shares information across the city, because you bring commanders together in one room, because what may be happening in one part of the city, it may be impacting another part of the city. It may be these same guys where a commander can say, "Well, yeah,

I've seen that happen, and I've seen this guy do this, and I've seen this guy do that." So then we come together and we put a strategy together as to what we're going to do and how we're going to combat this. So it's been extremely successful. It's vital, and I don't see how a police agency, especially a major police agency, can function without it.

**CP:** *There have been complaints of police talking crime victims out of filing reports, and you have been quoted as saying that it is acceptable for police not to take reports if the victim does not wish to file one, even for crimes as serious as shootings. How are you able to accurately track crime based on that policy?*

**LH:** We have procedure and policies that we follow. I mean, if a citizen calls, for example, that a crime is being committed, a police officer has to go there. A police officer has to investigate it, and it has to be documented, and it is documented, what that police officer did. Now, if in fact we suspect that a police officer is not doing what he's supposed to do, then that police officer is called in. We go and talk to citizens, because when you call 911 in our CAD system there's a phone number, and if it's a residence there's a name of a person who made that call. We'll go back to that person and say, "What have you done, how have you done it?"

We may get a call, for example, for a fight in progress, and we may get there and there's nobody there and there's nobody willing to talk to us, and we can't find any evidence of anybody being injured. We still go. We still respond, and we still give an answer as to what that officer did, but if no one's willing to respond, if no one is willing to talk to us, there's not very much that we can report. But a shooting, a stabbing, a cutting, you can't get around that. I mean, there's blood somewhere, somebody has to tell us something, so something is written, if it's nothing more than this person's name is written and we put in the report "uncooperative, don't want to talk," or something like that.

*[In February 2006, WBAL-TV's Jayne Miller did a series of reports on crimes that were going unreported. Victims complained of being badgered and threatened by police until they agreed not to report the crime. Cases were labeled unfounded despite evidence that a crime had occurred. In one instance, a shooting was deemed unfounded because the victims didn't want to cooperate. Miller interviewed Hamm, who defended this practice despite it being in direct opposition to department policy.]*

**CP:** *How successful have crime cameras been in deterring and solving crimes?*

**LH:** You know numbers are what you want them to be, but we've got documented proof that wherever there's a camera there's a 17 percent decrease in crime. We understand that crime is going to be displaced, so commanding officers need to come up with a plan for that displacement and they do.

Cameras do one of two things. They deter, and if they don't deter, they help solve crimes. They have been instrumental in some very important cases in solving some crimes. We had a young man kill a man on Cumberland and Pennsylvania Avenue. It was right there on the picture. This young man subsequently fled to North Carolina. We were able to find him, bring him back, prosecute him successfully because of the cameras.

**CP:** *Washington, D.C., is using technology that allows them to pinpoint the location of gunfire. Is that something Baltimore has considered using?*

**LH:** Well, we're taking a look at that. That's not--all the bugs haven't been worked out of that yet. So I'll let Washington, D.C., pay the money for the expense until it's perfected, and then I'll spend some money and do it.

**City Paper:** *Homicides were up last year, with 275 compared to 269 in 2005, and this year the city is on pace for yet another increase with 72 murders compared to 66 as of April 4. Why are homicides up, and what can be done to prevent them?*

**Leonard Hamm:** Why are homicides up? Homicides are up because what we have in Baltimore City are executions. These are not random shootings. Eighty-six percent of our homicide victims and suspects knew each other, there was a relationship between them. Whether it's drugs, whether it's respect, whether it's domestic, they knew one another, and for whatever reason they wanted to settle their differences, this is how these choose to settle their differences. I think that quite a few people that we have arrested for homicides feel as though there are no consequences for what they do, that whatever argument or whatever beef they have with someone else they are going to settle it themselves the way that they want to settle it. They are not going to have the police involved, so you have a situation where people who know people are killing each other, and the way you stop that, I think, is by the whole city coming together and providing service and work on those things that actually stop crime instead of reacting to crime. And those things that stop crime in Baltimore City, like economic issues, educational issues, and housing issues, and health issues, and you work on those things on the front end by bringing all of these city agencies and all of these resources together and then you're going to see a drop in these homicides. Now it may happen 10 years from now, it may happen five years from now, but it's a start.

**CP:** *It does seem like there has been an increase in innocent-bystander homicides in the last couple months.*

**LH:** [shakes his head no]

**CP:** *You don't agree?*

**LH:** Give me an example. Which one are you talking about?

**CP:** *Charles Erdman, Christopher Clarke . . .*

**Matt Jablow:** There are some, but the stats are pretty consistent. It's been the same for 20 years. In fact, this year, the percentage of victims with criminal records is even higher than it was last year. It's usually about 80, 82. This year it's right about 86, almost closer to 90 percent of our victims have lengthy criminal records. Yes, there are some who are completely innocent, but the stats don't bear that out.

*[According to statistics provided by the department, 84.7 percent of 2007 homicide victims as of April 2 had criminal records.]*

**CP:** *Recently, it has been said that while homicides and shootings have been up, robberies and aggravated assaults have been down. That seems sort of counterintuitive. How does that play out?*

**LH:** Well, what it tells you is that robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, those are controllable situations, because you put strategies in place and people in place. You identify stick-up men. Most stick-up men will do four or five stick-ups before we catch them, so you catch a guy whose doing stick-ups in an area and all of a sudden your stick-ups go [down]. It's like bank robbers. Bank robbers will rob 10 banks until they're caught, so you catch that bank robber. It's the theory that 6 percent of your people are causing about 60 percent of your crimes. So you concentrate on that 6 percent and it's very easy to bring those down.

The problem with homicides is the fact that some of them occur inside houses, some of them are domestic violence. We've had a couple of homicides captured on our cameras, our outside cameras, and they take three seconds, six seconds at the most. So if, in fact, a person has it in their mind that they're going to kill you, you can't put a police officer on every corner. It's difficult to stop that. That's why we deal with proactive targeted enforcement, because we know the guys in the neighborhoods who are carrying the guns, and we basically know the guys in the neighborhood who have done the killing, and these are the same guys who were arrested for murders but were found not guilty or were nolle prossed because we couldn't find a witness, whatever the case may be, and these guys walk around the neighborhood with a reputation of being immortal. These are the ones that we have to target, get them taken out.

*[According to information collected by City Paper from the police department over the course of the year, one quarter of 2007's homicides to date have occurred inside buildings.]*

**CP:** *Rises in homicides in Philadelphia and Boston have caused public outcry, despite the fact that their per capita rates are lower than Baltimore's. Why is Baltimore so unaffected by homicide?*

**LH:** I don't know. I can't answer that question.

**CP:** *How do you feel about it?*

**LH:** I think that homicide is a blight and a stain on the entire city.

**City Paper:** *The city and the police department have come under a lot of fire for the recent arrest of a 7-year-old boy. How do you feel about the public outcry the arrest has caused?*

**Leonard Hamm:** I think that it's appropriate. I think that the public demands and needs some answers, because they don't understand, and we'll give them those answers.

*[On April 19, the police department released a one-page report saying that while the arrest was in no way illegal, the department will "immediately undertake a comprehensive review of its policies and procedures regarding the arrest of young juveniles for misdemeanor crimes."]*

**CP:** *You have also taken heat from Fraternal Order of Police representatives, who claim you don't support your officers. How do you respond to that?*

**LH:** I think I support our officers, but when you're wrong, you're wrong. I'm not going to try to put a spin on something that's not right. If you're wrong, you're wrong. Our officers do many, many good

things, and many, many right things, and many, many judgment calls, but I'm not going to stand up and support violations of our rules and regulations. I'm not going to do that.

*CP: What is your plan for improving relations between the police and the community?*

**LH:** Well, what we have started with our community relation councils, and there are nine, each district has one, these districts sit down with our police officers and they come up with strategic plans for each district, one or two things that the police and the public can work on together, solve a problem in the community. We are very big this year on young people and helping the community solve problems with young people, `cause when I go to community meetings, that's all I hear, mainly. So what we have to do is make our [Police Athletic League] centers much more accessible, much more functional for young people, working in conjunction with Parks and Recreation, working in conjunction with schools. That's what I'd like to see happen.

*CP: What do you consider your major accomplishments as police commissioner so far?*

**LH:** We're one police department now, focused on one mission. We have everybody talking now, everybody sharing information. When you do that, you're successful in bringing down crime. And, you know, crime to a degree is a thing of perception. If people feel safe, then crime is down. If they don't feel safe, then I don't care what other numbers you show them, then crime's not down. So what we have done, I think, for most parts of the city, we've made people feel safe. And it's anecdotal. I don't have a survey or any hard numbers, but what I see are people walking the streets, walking their dogs, walking their pets. I see people playing basketball, playing tennis. I see young people riding bicycles up and down the sidewalk. I see people being able to sit out on their steps now. All of these things tell me, as a native Baltimorean, that something good's happening.

*CP: What else do you think our readers need to know about the Baltimore Police Department?*

**LH:** What the readers need to know is that they're lucky and fortunate to have the finest police agency in this country. And if you don't believe it, go someplace else and live, and you'll see for yourself that we have an open society, we have an open police department, we don't hide anything, anything you want to ask, anything you want to know, we'll tell you. People in Baltimore are very fortunate.