

## Double-murder trial costs to Clallam taxpayers edge toward \$900,000



**Darold R. Stenson during his retrial in Kitsap County. -- Photo by The Associated Press**

By Paul Gottlieb  
Peninsula Daily News

PORT ANGELES — Clallam County's costs to prosecute Darold R. Stenson of Sequim a second time for double murder are approaching \$900,000.

Expenses related to Stenson's trial, fueled by his three-lawyer legal team's \$300-an-hour per-person fees, have reached \$790,000 and could hit \$900,000 when all the bills are in, county Administrator Jim Jones told nearly 30 people at the Port Angeles Business Association breakfast meeting Tuesday.

Stenson will be sentenced at 10 a.m. Dec. 10 in Superior Court.

"There can be only one sentence: life without parole," his lawyer, Roger Hunko of Port Orchard, said Tuesday in a later interview.

Hunko said that "of course" he will appeal the sentence to the state Court of Appeals but would not say on what grounds.

"I think it was wrong," he said of the verdict, which took the jury six days to decide at the end of six weeks of testimony.

"I'm sure someone had some doubts if it took a week for them to come to a decision," Hunko said.

A Kitsap County jury found Stenson, 60, guilty Nov. 12 of two counts of first-degree premeditated, aggravated murder in the March 25, 1993, shooting deaths of his wife, Denise, and business partner, Frank Hoerner.

The state Supreme Court had overturned Stenson's 1994 death penalty conviction in May 2012, remanding the case to Clallam County, where Prosecuting Attorney Deborah Kelly sought a mandatory life sentence.

Law-and-justice spending alone for 2013 is expected to exceed \$19 million compared with \$17 million in 2012, Jones said in his presentation, which focused on 2013 spending and the 2014 preliminary budget.

"The reason it will be over \$19 million is because of the Stenson trial," he said, adding that the 2013 increase includes cost-of-living increases and a large increase in retirement benefits.

"I'm really thinking we'll be at \$850,000 or \$900,000 by the time we're done" with bills for the Stenson defense.

Had the nonprofit Clallam Public Defender, which contracts with the county for indigent defense, represented Stenson, the cost to the county would have been less than \$100,000, Jones estimated.

But Clallam Public Defender could not represent Stenson at the outset of his case because Kelly had not decided whether she would seek the death penalty, and Clallam Public Defender had no one to handle death penalty cases.

Taxpayers statewide will foot most of the bill for Stenson's appeal, Jones said.

During Jones' presentation Tuesday, he focused on 2013 spending and the preliminary 2014 county general fund budget.

The spending plan shows \$32.4 million for day-to-day expenses and \$32 million of revenue, with about \$400,000 use of reserves to balance the two totals.

That compares with a 2013 projected general fund budget of \$31 million for expenses and \$30.7 million in revenue, and use of about \$240,000 use of reserves to cover spending.

County revenue reached an all-time high of \$31.9 million in 2007 and has stayed flat since then, Jones said.

"We don't see any increase in this revenue in the foreseeable future," he added.

"That does not bode well when income is flat and you have inflation of about 2.7 percent."

The county started dipping into reserves in 2008, Jones added.

At the same time, the county has eliminated 49 full-time-equivalent, or FTE, positions through attrition and reduction of hours since 2009 for a 12 percent cut in FTE employees and hours.

There were 413 FTE employees working for the county in 2009.

That compares with 364 FTE employees working for the county as of Jan. 1 if the commissioners approve a budget Dec. 3.

The 2014 budget includes a reduction in hours for most employees from 40 hours a week to

37.5 hours.

Even though the county has fewer employees, overall salaries and benefits are expected to go up in 2014 because the county will restore cost-of-living increases and retirement and medical benefits that were halted or significantly reduced for 2012 and 2013.

Benefits increased twice as much as salaries, Jones said.

“Since there’s no new money, we have to have fewer people, and the combination means fewer full-time-equivalent people,” Jones said in a later interview.

Law and justice accounts for 48 percent of the entire county government workforce and 71.2 percent of the salaries of benefits.

The 2014 spending plan will be approved after county commissioners hold two public hearings at the courthouse Dec. 3.

---

Senior Staff Writer Paul Gottlieb can be reached at 360-452-2345, ext. 5060, or at [pgottlieb@peninsuladailynews.com](mailto:pgottlieb@peninsuladailynews.com).

Last modified: November 19. 2013 6:37PM