

OpenKennett  
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Chadds Ford, PA 19317

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## **Skyrocketing Fire/EMS costs and potential conflicts of interest in Kennett**

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*What you should know and what you can do about it*



## OpenKennett News

Skyrocketing Fire/EMS costs and potential conflicts of interest in Kennett

Dear Fellow Kennett Township Resident,

I am a 20+ year Kennett Township resident and taxpayer who is very concerned about some of the recent decisions by our Township government. This includes the recent reorganization of our Fire and EMS services, a major topic in the 2021 election for Township Supervisor. I am writing you now to alert you to yet more controversies about new costs and potential conflicts of interests, and suggest ways concerned citizens can learn more and demand action from our Township Supervisors. Read more below, or check out my new website [www.OpenKennett.org](http://www.OpenKennett.org) and click on "Fire."

### Some Background

During my campaign for Kennett Township (KT) Supervisor in early 2021, I raised the possibility that KT's Manager Eden Ratliff had repeatedly abused the authority of his public office in a rushed reorganization of KT's Fire and EMS services. Specifically, I expressed concerns that Ratliff relied on faulty analyses, questionable tactics, and a false sense of urgency to aggressively push for that reorganization, an outcome that was highly favorable to Longwood Fire Company (LFC) and very unfavorable to Kennett Fire Company (KFC) and KT's own residents and taxpayers.

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**Ratliff relied on faulty analyses, questionable tactics, and a false sense of urgency to aggressively push for the reorganization of Fire/EMS services**

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As you may recall, LFC previously provided Fire/EMS services to the eastern half of the KT while KFC handled the western half. As a result of Ratliff's reorganization, LFC ended up with a virtual monopoly of all emergency services in KT and the Borough of Kennett Square (KSQ). Each phase of this deal was approved by Supervisors Whitney Hoffman and Richard Leff - the majority of the Kennett Township Board of Supervisors (KT-BOS) - but with Supervisor Scudder Stevens strenuously opposed.

Stevens's opposition was echoed by KSQ Mayor Matt Fetick and many citizens who were concerned that KFC had been treated unfairly, and that the deal would ultimately cost KT and KSQ residents a lot more money in both taxes and fees. It now turns out that all of these concerns were well-founded! What happened?

### Skyrocketing Fire/EMS costs with no coherent analysis or plan

In their vote on 12/2/20 to support Phase 1 of Ratliff's plan, Supervisors Hoffman and Leff repeatedly referenced Ratliff's claimed savings of \$250k across the region. The problem? Those savings never materialized! In fact, just one day after starting their new contract, LFC requested an additional \$70K to fund the plan. And just 2 months later, after Phase 2 was approved, LFC received another one-time funding of \$300K to implement the reorganization. Then, at the KT-BOS meeting of 11/3/21, Ratliff announced a 32% increase -

an additional \$160k - in the cost of Fire/EMS services for Kennett Township for 2022. Ratliff reported that this massive increase was needed not only to pay for additional firefighters but to make up for years of deficit spending and to undertake a \$250K “volunteer recruitment” program. These increases are on top of the additional per-incident revenues LFC is now receiving from its monopoly of EMS, which is \$200 per incident more than KFC’s previous rates. And all that’s just in the first year!

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**Instead of the \$250k in savings promised by Ratliff, the reorganization resulted in \$600k in new expenses**

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How did \$250k in savings become \$600K in new expenses? The flawed analysis Ratliff presented on 12/2/20 failed to anticipate at least \$70k in new costs claimed by LFC on 3/2/21. It also failed to consider the massive increases requested on 11/3/21 for volunteer recruitment and new firefighters.

In my campaign, I drew attention to significant deficit spending by LFC, which reported a \$400k loss in 2019 alone, more than 20% of its revenue. This should have triggered serious concern

for LFC’s long-term sustainability. Are salaries too high or are revenues falling? Is the organization drifting into a death spiral of debt?

While a public debate ensued, Ratliff provided no data to counter these concerns about LFC’s sustainability. Instead, he continued to recommend restructuring that increased KT’s dependence on LFC for Fire/EMS. But just 6 months later, after Ratliff had completed LFC’s takeover of much of KFC’s services, he justified the 32% increase in funding as needed to address “multi-year deficit spending by companies who have been insufficiently funded.” The evidence suggests that Ratliff was quite willing to overlook potential long-term financial problems at LFC while he handed them a virtual monopoly.

## **Serious Conflicts of Interest?**

At that same 4/15/2021 meeting when LFC’s takeover of KFC was completed, Ratliff admitted for the first time that, during the negotiations, he and two members of his immediate family had become volunteers for LFC. This clear conflict of interest was compounded by the fact that Ratliff failed to report it to either KT-BOS or KFC.

“Conflict of Interest“ (The PA Public Official and Employee Ethics Act, § 1102): Use by a public official or public employee of the authority of his office or employment or any confidential information received through his holding public office or employment for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, a member of his immediate family or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated.”

But more recently there has surfaced even clearer evidence of a more serious conflict of interest. In early November 2021, the KT-BOS learned that Ratliff’s wife, Gabrielle, had been hired as the Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief at LFC, a highly skilled and paid position, starting 10/29/2021. Ratliff subsequently confirmed it in an 11/8/2021 memo to the KT-BOS which has previously not been publicly revealed.

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**Gabrielle Ratliff’s new position at Longwood Fire was probably created through the new funding engineered by her husband**

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Her new position has placed Ratliff’s wife in a key role with a major KT services vendor which has derived a significant pecuniary advantage from the Fire/EMS reorganization recently engineered by Ratliff himself. Indeed, it seems likely that Gabrielle Ratliff’s job was made possible in large part because of the new funding engineered by her husband. Moreover, the hiring of Ratliff’s wife also transpired without LFC, Ratliff, or Ratliff’s wife informing KT-BOS in advance.

## What Can We Do?

Many people share similar concerns and are frustrated with our Board of Supervisors for taking no action and providing the public with no real information about this situation. Questions at public meetings are sometimes dodged, deflected, or simply ignored.

My new site - Open Kennett ([www.OpenKennett.org](http://www.OpenKennett.org)) - is a public forum for all of us to share information to better understand important local issues like these. We have posted detailed information about the Fire/EMS debate there, including links to all relevant, publicly available documents. And you can subscribe to Open Kennett to stay updated on these and other issues and to write or petition our leaders to take action.

We must hold every supervisor, employee, and organization supported by KT accountable. Every day that unacceptable or unethical behavior is ignored risks further damage to KT's interests, the public trust in KT's government, and KT's relationships with other municipalities and organizations it works with.

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supervisor, employee,  
and organization  
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## My Ethics Complaint

As a Kennett Township resident and former candidate for public office, I concluded that it is my civic duty to formally request the Pennsylvania Ethics Commission to open an inquiry into the apparent conflicts of interest described above (see next page). The full complaint with supporting documents is available on [www.OpenKennett.org](http://www.OpenKennett.org).

I believe that the failures and potential conflicts of interest I have sought to document here are simply unacceptable in any employee, regardless of how competent they might otherwise appear to be. I am also calling on the supervisors to seek a new Township Manager as soon as possible. If you agree, see [www.OpenKennett.org](http://www.OpenKennett.org), where you can easily forward a relevant comment directly to the Supervisors.

**Government cannot work when otherwise good citizens  
sit on the sidelines. Become informed, demand answers,  
and hold people accountable. *Start now!***



Peter Doehring

Resident and Homeowner, Kennett Township;  
Former Candidate, Kennett Township Supervisor





**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

**ETHICS  
COMPLAINT**

Mail completed form to:

**State Ethics Commission  
Finance Building  
613 North Street, Room 309  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0400**

**(717) 783-1610  
1-800-932-0936  
www.ethics.pa.gov**

**INSTRUCTIONS – Please see reverse side of this form.**

1. Identify the individual you are complaining about.

Name: Eden Ratliff

Position or Title: Township Manager

Address: 801 Burrows Run Rd  
Chadds Ford, PA 19317

Work Phone Number: 610-300-1300

Home Phone Number:

2. Explain in detail why you believe the individual named above may have violated the Ethics Act. Attach an extra sheet of paper if necessary.

The PA Public Official and Employee Ethics Act defines "conflict of interest" in § 1102 as: "Use by a public official or public employee of the authority of his office or employment or any confidential information received through his holding public office or employment for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, a member of his immediate family or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated."

We contend that beginning in late 2020, Kennett Township (KT) Manager Eden Ratliff repeatedly used the authority of his public office and confidential information received through his holding public office for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, at least one member of his immediate family, and a business - Longwood Fire Company (LFC) - with which he and two members of his immediate family were closely associated. Based on the definition above, we believe this constitutes one or more 'conflicts of interest.' (Continued on attached pages)

**Full complaint available at [www.OpenKennett.org](http://www.OpenKennett.org)**

### **BASIC ETHICS COMPLAINT TIMELINE**

**8/21/2019** - KT-BOS publicly announces that Eden Ratliff has been hired to be KT Manager

**9/23/2019** - Ratliff officially starts as KT Manager

**Late 2020 or early 2021** - Ratliff, his wife, and his brother become LFC volunteers

**10/29/2020** - At a public KT-BOS meeting, Ratliff first proposes moving KT EMS from KFC to LFC, claiming it is a funding issue

**Late 2020** - Ratliff begins a series of negotiations with KFC, LFC, and KFERC, aided by KT Supervisors Leff and Hoffman; does not reveal his association with LFC

**2/3/2021** - KT-BOS approves Phase 1 of Ratliff's planned Fire/EMS reorganization; all KT EMS business to be moved to LFC by 3/1/2021

**4/15/2021** - KT-BOS approves Phase 2 of Ratliff's planned Fire/EMS reorganization; KT EMS dismantled and KSQ EMS business moved to LFC effective 5/1/2021; Ratliff publicly admits to his family's relationship to LFC

**8/15/2021** - LFC advertises for a paid Executive Assistant

**10/28/2021** - Ratliff's wife Gabrielle begins work as LFC's new paid Executive Assistant

**11/3/2021** - Ratliff presents 2022 budget for Fire/EMS that includes a 32% increase of costs, in part to address years of deficit spending

**11/8/2021** - Ratliff admits to his wife's recent employment at LFC