



July 5, 2023

Via Email Only

Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission
ATTN: Cuyler Walker, Chairman
801 Burrows Run Road
Chadds Ford, PA 19317

RE: Notice of Withdrawal of Borough of Kennett Square from Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission

Dear Chairman Walker:

I am writing on behalf of the Kennett Township Supervisors concerning the Borough of Kennett Square's notice of withdrawal from the Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission. In the final days of June 2023, the Council of the Borough of Kennett Square voted unanimously to withdraw the Borough's membership in the Commission. The Borough's voting delegate to the Commission, Mayor Fetick, was absent from the meeting.

This action of the Borough Council is another development in a long history with the Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission. The Borough's engagement over time with the Commission has ebbed and flowed with periods of significant engagement and periods of noteworthy absence. The Commission has served as a mechanism for the region to provide necessary funding to the regional fire companies. In addition, the Commission serves as a forum for the fire companies to review their services, challenges, threats, opportunities, and successes. Pre-dating the Commission, the fire companies met separately with all six municipalities to request funding. As the Borough knows, this was ineffective, unhelpful to the fire companies, and did not allow for long-term planning of funding nor service delivery.

While the Commission itself has processes in need of improvement, it is worth noting some of its successes. In the beginning of the Commission, the commissioners pleaded with the fire companies to work together and improve their relationships. The tension between them was comparable to a localized cold war. Since then, the companies have elected to form a regional command structure where they operate as one regional fire company. This has improved their service delivery strategies, moved toward more efficient operations, and unified services across the region.

In addition, the Commission has continued to conduct and execute studies of services being provided to the region. The 2016 VFIS Study, among other things, recommended that Emergency Medical Service be consolidated to a single provider for cost and efficiency gains. This was implemented in 2021. The apparatus replacement study recommended fleet consolidation and a replacement schedule. The Kennett Township team is advising the Commission on how to fund this recommendation which has majority support from the Commission and the fire companies.

The Borough seems to be relying, in part, on a recent study they commissioned by Fitch Associates to justify its withdrawal from the Commission. It should be noted that this study only evaluated the Borough of Kennett Square and did not look at the needs of the region which are served under a single provider model (regional response

model). The study also has material misstatements which call into question its validity. For example, it says that the Fire Commission does not have an audit, which is not true. It also states that EMS deployment comes from Longwood Fire Company and PoMarLin Fire Company. This is also erroneous as there is no deployment of EMS from PoMarLin, rather, it comes from Kennett Fire Company. It must be said that since the Borough raised the issue of its financial difficulties more than a year ago, a committee was setup under the chairmanship of the Borough to address these issues and failed to do so.

Kennett Township continues to be a supporter of the Commission and the six original municipalities remaining within the Commission to work together to solve common problems and fund required infrastructure. Kennett Township has supported multiple reductions in funding from the Borough to the Commission leading to more than \$150,000 in savings for Borough taxpayers. This support was in recognition of the Borough's alleged financial difficulties and the Township's desire for the region to continue working together.

Kennett Township recommends the following:

1. The Commission should appoint a new negotiating committee to engage with the Borough.
2. The Commission engage in negotiations with the Borough to allow the Borough to rejoin the Commission or otherwise be served by the Regional Fire Company in a manner that is equitable to the Commission and the fire companies.
3. Municipalities being served by the Regional Fire Company who are not members of the Commission or do not provide emergency services mutual aid, should be responsible to fund the full cost for the services they receive from the Regional Fire Company.
4. Any balance of future funding left by the Borough's withdrawal be absorbed by the municipalities and not the fire companies.
5. The Borough be requested to pay its 2023 funding forgiveness amount of \$122,828.98 as it promised to do so.

In response to the three points in the Borough's June 27, 2023, letter:

1. Kennett Township agrees that the Commission should hire and empower a qualified regional administrator.
2. Kennett Township is willing to discuss the merits of an independent fire and emergency services evaluation.
3. Kennett Township will not support amending the agreement of the Commission to require budgets to be adopted unanimously effectively giving one municipality veto power.

In closing, Kennett Township believes the Commission should remain unified in its pursuit to support the fire companies and ensure there is adequate funding for them to provide high quality services. We hope this letter serves as a plan of action for the next steps by the Commission.

Sincerely,



Eden R. Ratliff,
Township Manager