

New Sabattus police chief says he's in for the long haul: 'They deserve some stability'

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Sabattus Town Manager Raquel Welch-Day, left, with new police Chief Wayne Drake. Drake started Monday. (Mark Laflamme/Staff Writer)

SABATTUS — At long last, the town of Sabattus may have found its dream team.

This week, Wayne Drake took over as police chief, the fourth to take on that position in the past year alone.

And while Sabattus Town Manager Raquel Welch-Day researched her new chief plenty before hiring him, Drake also researched her.

Town government in Sabattus has been messy in recent years. Drake wanted to be sure that the town was in good hands if he was going to serve as police chief there.

“She’s well-liked and well-respected,” Drake said of Welch-Day, “but she had also been through the fire — had been through a small town losing its police department and all the dynamics that go with that. So, I knew she was a safe boss to have here to have in control.”

Before [coming to Sabattus in the summer of 2025](#), Welch-Day served for five years with the town of Mexico, where a badly understaffed police department disbanded in 2024.

When Welch-Day, a former school teacher, came to Sabattus in 2025, the town was in crisis. Not only were [police chiefs coming and going](#), but they had trouble holding on to town managers, as well. Welch-Day came in at a time where the town was in near constant turmoil.

One former Sabattus police chief, David Lyons, quit the job in February, declaring that the town was “falling apart.”

The only thing holding the town together, Lyons said at the time, was Welch-Day’s commitment to improving the situation.

And those improvements have continued to come since Lyons’ departure.

“It’s definitely quieted over the past year,” Welch-Day said Tuesday. “Things are generally getting better and better every day.”

Drake, when he was considering the chief’s position, liked the direction in which Welch-Day was taking things. He liked that she had brought in [former Mechanic Falls police Chief Jeff Goss](#) to serve as interim chief until a permanent chief could be hired.

On Tuesday, Goss was still at the Sabattus police station helping Drake to get adjusted in the new position.

“It’s been a warm, gradual handoff,” Drake said. “There’s been none of that chaos that Sabattus has dealt with.”

Drake’s diverse background includes police work in Farmington, Wilton and Lisbon. He’s also been a bank manager and [ran natural food stores](#) in Lisbon and Farmington.

There were times, Drake said, when he worked seven days a week, running a small business and working on a police force at the same time.

This is a man who tends to look at all the angles before making a career move. And when he agreed to come to Sabattus, he was looking for something permanent; not only for himself, but for the people he’ll serve, as well.

“It’s a great little town,” Drake said. “I’ve heard that from so many people. And they deserve some stability.”

It's not as though a town of roughly 5,400 souls is unfamiliar to the new chief. Drake grew up on a dairy farm in New Vineyard. He feels perfectly comfortable in a small town farming community.

"I was out in a cow pasture yesterday," Drake said. "It felt like home. I could spend a long time here."

When Welch-Day was poring through a list of candidates for the chief position, she relied heavily on Goss, a career cop who only recently retired from the force in Mechanic Falls.

When Drake threw his hat into the ring, he caught Goss' eye, and Welch-Day came to agree that this was the man for the job.

When it came time for the town selectboard to weigh in, it was a straightforward affair: The board unanimously voted to hire Drake, showing a kind of unity that has been lacking in recent years.

"We all want what's best for the town," Drake said. "We're all community caretakers at the end of the day."

As police chief, Drake favors an emphasis on community-based policing, a strategy supported by Welch-Day. And with the Sabattus police force presently three officers down, one of his first duties will be to hire replacements.

Drake plans to do his homework before making those hires. He has a specific set of qualifications he'd like to see in new hires and he for sure wants to bring onboard only officers who will commit to staying in the town.

"If you want stability," Drake said, "you need to have a team that sticks together and stays together."

With Welch-Day, Drake will work on enticing just the right new officers to the town. Pay has to be competitive, they both understand, and Drake likes the idea of 20-year retirement packages as an incentive.

In the past, Sabattus, like other small towns, has experienced the problem of high turnover on the police force. The town pays for an officer to get trained, and then those officers are lured away by jobs with better pay.

They'd like to avoid that going forward.

"If you're not competitive with wages, you're going to be a training ground," Welch-Day said. "Inevitably, that's what's going to happen."

Drake would like to hire new officers who live in or near Sabattus. He favors candidates in their late 20s and will always prioritize those potential officers who are good communicators.

“You know, 90% of this job is just how you talk to people,” Drake said. “If you can do that, we can train you on the other stuff.”

Not that it’s all serious work for the town’s putative dream team. Presently, Drake and Welch-Day are working together on the town’s first-ever Halloween parade, scheduled to start on Main Street on Oct. 24 and to be followed by a trunk-or-treat event at the former Sabattus Elementary School.

With good stuff like that in mind, both Drake and Welch-Day speak of putting the past behind them and making things more consistent and reliable for the people of Sabattus.

“We’re going to stick it out,” Welch-Day said. “We’re going to get everything back in order and move ahead.”

Drake likes that idea, as well. On Tuesday, his second day on the job, he was nothing but optimistic about the town’s future, in spite of its difficult past.

“You definitely have to go into things knowing what you’re up against,” said Drake. “And I do love a challenge.”

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