



## Sandwich police open up new headquarters

By Tanner Stening

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SANDWICH — Three years after voters approved spending \$17 million for a new public safety complex, Sandwich's new police station is online and arrest-ready.

"I'm very happy," Sandwich Police Chief Peter Wack said Monday inside the state-of-the-art station, where department employees were gradually moving in. "The architect, the building manager and the building company have all been very easy to work with. Just very professional operations."

The major public safety project, approved at town meeting in May 2016, consisted of a new police station on Quaker Meetinghouse Road, a new fire substation on the same property and the addition of a bunk room at the East Sandwich fire station.

Wack said the fire station is about two months away from completion. An opening for that facility has yet to be announced.

Voters narrowly approved the spending package in the form of Proposition 2½ debt exclusion, with 1,655 voting in favor and 1,620 voting against.

Town officials have said upgrades to both police and fire department infrastructure were sorely needed. Sandwich's old police station off 6A is roughly one-third the size of the new public safety complex (4,000 square feet compared to 13,000) and was outfitted for a department with nine employees. The new station — complete with sleek evidence lockers, a multipurpose "live" indoor training area and a labyrinthine network of interview, conference and office rooms — services more than 60 employees, Wack said.

"We were both operating in very old, antiquated buildings," he said of the police and fire departments. "We were all in attic space."

Additionally, the existing fire and police stations operate in flood zones and have been prone to flooding in recent years, including during last year's string of nor'easters.

"It was a matter of getting a better sized area to work, and out of the floodplain," Wack said.

The holding cells at the old police station, which was built in the 1970s, have repeatedly failed to meet state health department standards with respect to, among other things, suicide risk testing, plumbing and overall safety, Wack said.

He said the old building also presented significant security concerns because of how close inmates would come to the staff when they were being escorted and processed.

"They had to walk in the same hallways and the same rooms," he said. "Now when a prisoner is in here, we can do everything with them without giving them access to the building."

Crime rates in Sandwich have dropped significantly since 2010, according to Wack. The department responds to fewer than 15 burglaries, which is down from prior years when there have been as many as 500.

"We don't have a lot of crime," Wack said. "It's basically a lot of motor vehicle crashes."

The department processes about 600 arrests a year, Wack said, mostly those involving drug use, domestic violence and petty larceny.

Efforts to upgrade police and fire infrastructure have nicely aligned with the town's plans to consolidate other municipal operations. The town is in the process of consolidating offices at Jan Sebastian Drive, Town Hall, and the Town Hall annex in one location. That consolidation is slated for the former Santander bank building at 100 Route 6A, which residents recently voted to acquire for \$3.95 million.

"These are really the first new town buildings that we've built since the early '70s," Town Manager George "Bud" Dunham said of the public safety complex, noting that the town's population has increased from roughly 4,000 to more than

20,000 since then.

That population boom has also coincided with a shift in police and fire safety protocols, Wack said.

As with the police building, the new fire substation will house administrative and emergency personnel, Dunham said.

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