# **Swampscott's Anchor Food Pantry settles into new Burrill Street digs**

<https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/swampscott-reporter/2021/06/28/swampscott-anchor-food-pantry-settles-into-new-location-at-old-police-station-on-burrill-street/5366679001/?fbclid=IwAR02yv3RM_kQpLBoFgqAhVKD5akiumsnwDV0h-1j5a-fzQz2RsIlYgp1VfY>

The Anchor Food Pantry is settling into its new digs at Swampscott’s old Burrill Street police station after a whirlwind of a first year.

The past year has been a baptism by fire for the nascent nonprofit, supplying Swampscott and Nahant families and individuals in need with groceries and wares during a once-in-a-century pandemic.

Following COVID-19’s arrival in mid-March of 2020, the nonprofit’s volunteers and board members jumped in to help fill a community need as the town hunkered down. The board of directors had planned on making a big debut on the Swampscott Town Meeting floor last year, but [the public health crisis derailed those plans.](https://swampscott.wickedlocal.com/news/20200407/during-coronavirus-crisis-revamped-swampscott-food-pantry-anchors-seniors-families)

The organization would take up residency in and operate out of a shuttered Swampscott Senior Center.

“We are proud of the fact that we were open throughout the whole pandemic while remaining safe and healthy,” the food pantry’s president, Laura Spathanas, told The Swampscott Reporter. “Over the past year, we have really been in a reactive mode, just trying to stay ahead of our supply and get food in our neighbors’ homes.”

The food pantry moved into its Burrill Street location in late May with a year’s worth of serious experience.

“We now look forward to being able to be proactive, working on finding residents we haven’t reached yet who need our services and helping our current visitors with additional resources,” said Spathanas.

Operating and running the food pantry takes a village, she said, adding that the relocation took two months of coordination.

“We have an amazing group of dedicated and hard-working volunteers who always show up and give 100 percent,” Spathanas said. “Without them, we would not have been able to move in the quick and efficient way we did.”

She noted each of the 12 members of the Anchor Food Pantry Board of Directors carried out behind-the-scenes responsibilities.

The community need that the food pantry meets still exists and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Spathanas.

“We can only assume the affects of this last year will be long lasting. It may take some families quite a while to get back to where they were financially, emotionally and physically pre-pandemic,” Spathanas said. “We have not slowed down. In fact we continue to have new guests walk through the doors all the time.”

The food pantry resembles a tiny grocery store: One that empowers guests by giving them choice rather than telling them what they need.

"Visitors can come in and shop on their own and, for the most part, choose whatever they need and how ever much they need," Spathanas said. "Although guests can shop on their own now, we still have many ways that allow our visitors and volunteers to interact. We have all gotten to know each other so well over the last year and enjoy seeing and talking to each other each week."

The larger of the two rooms contains four aisles of shelves stocked with nonperishable food and wares. In a separate room, folks will find four more aisles of shelves stocked with household supplies and personal hygiene products.

"Because of so many generous donors who fill our Amazon wish list, we are able to offer unlimited feminine hygiene products to any visitor," said Spathanas.

All of this comes after the nonprofit and the town entered a lease in exchange for the nonprofit agreeing to "follow our mission of ending food insecurity in our community."

The Anchor Food Pantry has forged partnerships with the local government and other community-based organizations. It partnered with neighboring Marblehead-based SPUR to provide children of the families whom they serve with backpacks. In partnership with the Swampscott Senior Center staff, it delivered and handed out groceries and meals to seniors, students and families (including during Thanksgiving and Christmas).

"We are working with our town's veterans agent and Nahant veterans to make sure we are taking care of this honorable group of our community [and] their families," said Spathanas, "We have recently begun partnering with a local organization who provides services to homeless youth."

And if that wasn't enough, the nonprofit maintains a garden near the Swampscott dog park that will soon be ready to harvest.

"Our visitors are looking forward to receiving this fresh produce," said Spathanas.

The Anchor Food Pantry is open Monday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Wednesday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The nonprofit offers a delivery option to anyone who cannot get out or is uncomfortable visiting the food pantry. For more information, send an email to theanchorfoodpantry@gmail.com or call 781-479-3080.

“We encourage any neighbor in need to visit us or reach out,” Spathanas said. “We are a caring and compassionate group and treat all our visitors with respect and dignity.”

She added, “We understand it is not always easy to visit a food pantry, but we all know life can be hard sometimes, and we are here to offer some relief and love.”