



Spotlight on the Weston Public Library

by

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Libraries in the 21st century continue to evolve in response to the changing needs of their communities in an increasingly digital age, facing both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. As libraries shift their services to meet demand — offering more online resources, digital materials, virtual programs, and emerging technologies — they must also navigate obstacles such as budget constraints, space limitations, and the ongoing need to maintain traditional services. The Weston Public Library has served the Town of Weston for over 90 years, with consistent, demonstrated support from patrons for its collections, programs, services, and facility. Like many of our peers, we face modern challenges, but by reflecting on our past, understanding the present, and with deliberate planning for the future, we will ensure the Weston Public Library continues to thrive as both a cornerstone of the community and a leader in modern library service.

Looking ahead, the future of the Weston Public Library lies in blending traditional services with emerging trends. Our physical and digital collections, programming for all ages, and the facility itself have never been more popular, surpassing 58,000 visits last year. But high demand for existing services makes innovation challenging. To introduce new, untested ideas without sacrificing what's already successful, we must weigh the added value against any potential loss, and explore whether that loss can be avoided entirely. The Library's history of thoughtful growth offers insight into how we can continue evolving successfully.

The Weston Public Library was founded in 1935 in the basement of the original Horace C. Hurlbutt, Jr. School. In 1963, the current building, designed by renowned mid-century modern architect Joseph P. Salerno, opened its doors. Originally 6,742 square feet, the facility has since undergone two major expansions, now totaling 14,152 square feet. Throughout each renovation, careful attention has been paid to preserving the building's distinctive architectural character.

In the coming years, we intend to implement incremental but impactful improvements to enhance both patron and staff experiences. Through a State Library Construction Grant matched by the Town, we will install a new ADA-compliant, custom circulation desk designed to improve efficiency and accessibility for all. The same grant will also fund the installation of an emergency generator capable of powering the entire facility during outages. When the community loses power, the Library is often one of the first places people turn for help, but to serve as that vital resource, we must ensure that we remain operational. These facility upgrades are just one part of our broader effort to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Just as we're enhancing our physical space to better serve patrons, we're also seeing a growing appreciation for both traditional and digital library services. Weston residents continue to value traditional library services such as physical books while also embracing new technologies and formats. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, circulation of physical materials surpassed 65,000 for the first

time since 2008, and our digital collections reached a record-high circulation of 21,800, together marking one of the highest combined circulation figures in the Library's history. As we near the end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year, we are on track to surpass those numbers once again.

However, a deeper look at the data reveals a more nuanced picture, which allows room for innovation. Physical and digital book circulation across all age groups has grown by 121% and 194%, respectively, over the past decade. Meanwhile, physical audio and video circulation has declined significantly — by 58% and 64%, respectively. Audiobooks on CD have seen a sharp drop due to the decline of CD players in homes and vehicles, making a resurgence unlikely. In contrast, while DVD and Blu-ray circulation has also declined, the rising costs of digital streaming services could prompt some users to return to physical media or to explore the Library's digital offerings like Hoopla. Although it may be premature to eliminate the A/V collection entirely, we can consider reducing the footprint of the audiobook collection in particular to free up space for new initiatives.

Technology has been a core service of the Library for years and will remain so. Recently, our self-checkout station was upgraded with new hardware to enhance responsiveness and accessibility. The Makerspace also received a new 3D printer thanks to the Friends of the Weston Public Library, a private, volunteer-driven nonprofit organization. In the Children's Room, we replaced our two AWE early learning computer stations with new models, including one offering bilingual programs in English and Spanish, to help our youngest patrons develop literacy skills in language, science, math, and the arts.

Innovation also extends beyond technology. We've expanded our Library of Things to include tools, yard games, tabletop roleplaying game supplies, game consoles, and musical instruments — items residents may need only occasionally, making them ideal for borrowing rather than purchasing. We also introduced a self-service Starbucks coffee machine in the Library Café area, offering three coffee blends and hot cocoa.

Another area of growth is programming. While programs for our youngest patrons have long been a staple, the Town does not currently allocate funding or staffing for adult programming. This is where the Friends of the Weston Public Library play a crucial role. Their ongoing support has enabled a diverse array of adult programs, including book groups, the *New Yorker* Roundtable, virtual art lectures, the Sunday Soundscapes music series, the Weston Photography Club, special events, adult summer reading programs, shredding days, and book sales.

As the Weston Public Library continues to adapt to the evolving needs of the community, we remain committed to preserving the services our patrons value while thoughtfully embracing innovation. Our growing circulation numbers, diverse programming, and technological advancements reflect a Library that honors its legacy while looking toward the future. Whether it's expanding our digital offerings, reimagining physical space, or introducing creative new services, our goal is to ensure the Library remains a dynamic, inclusive, and essential resource for all. With the continued support of the Town, the Board of Trustees, and the dedication of the Friends of the Weston Public Library, I am confident that the Library will not only meet the challenges ahead, but thrive.

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