Environmental Scan Report

# Demographics

## Westminster’s Population

* The 2022 Census ACS reported that Westminster’s population was 8,330 residents.
	+ 3,248 households
	+ 2.53 persons per household
* The [2023 Annual Report](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/uploads/full_book_for_posting.pdf) said the local census recorded the town's population at 8,418.
* [2023 Advisory Board Report](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/uploads/fy_24_adv_bd_booklet_final.pdf) said that the town census done by the Town Clerk in 2022 showed the population was 8,441.
	+ The AB Report said the population grew by 11% between 2012 and 2022.
* The [Montachusett Regional Planning Commission’s demographic profile](https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif3491/f/uploads/final_2023_title_vi_report_.pdf) in its December 2023 annual report lists Westminster’s population as follows:
	+ Total population: 8,148
	+ White alone residents: 7,942
	+ Minority residents: 206 (2.5%)
	+ Elderly residents: 1,775 (21.8%)
	+ Disabled residents: 557 (6.8%)
	+ Below poverty level: 184 (2.3%)

## Population Comparisons

* According to the 2022 Census ACS Quick Facts, the population of towns and cities surrounding Westminster are as follows:

| **Town** | **Population** |
| --- | --- |
| Westminster | 8,330 |
| Ashburnham | 6,337 |
| Hubbardston | 4,338 |
| Princeton | 3,497 |
| Gardner | 21,090 |
| Fitchburg | 41,621 |
| Lunenburg | 2,149 |
| Sterling | 8,053 |
| Rutland | 1,690 |

## Facts about Westminster’s Population

* Median household income (in 2022 dollars) was $95,674.
* 3.4%, or 283 residents, reported living in poverty.
* 5.50%, or 458 residents, were under 5 years old in 2022.
* 19.60%, or 1,633, were under 18 years.
* 26.90%, or 2,245 residents, were 65 years old and over.
* Over half, 52.90%, were identified as female.
* Westminster is predominantly white (97.5%).
* The only ethnicities recorded were:
	+ Hispanic/Latino at 1.5%, or 125 residents
	+ Asian at 0.60%, or 50 residents
	+ Two or more races at 1.70%, or 142 residents
* 2%, or 167 residents, identified as foreign-born between 2018-2022
* 3.6% reported speaking a language other than English at home
* 599 identified as veterans between 2018-2022
* Most residents live in single-family homes (85.8%)
* Those with a mortgage paid a median of $2,125/month
* Those without a mortgage paid $910/month for housing costs
* Median gross rent was $1,597/month

## Technology Access

* Most households had a computer (94.8%).
* 91.8% of households had a broadband Internet subscription (2018-2022), which indicates that 683 households did not.

## Education

* Most residents 25 and over reported having a high school diploma (93.8%).
* Only 40.2% of residents 25 and over reported having a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating that 4,981 have less than a bachelor's degree.
* AWRSD school enrollment in the 2023-2024 school year was reported to the Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Education:
	+ [Meetinghouse School](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=06100010&orgtypecode=6&) (Pre-K thru Grade 1): 195 students
	+ [Westminster Elementary](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=06100005&orgtypecode=6&) (Grades 2-5): 408 students
* Between late April 2020 and mid-October 2020, the height of the COVID-19 outbreak and public schools' pivot to virtual learning, the [percentage of households with school-aged children reporting homeschooling](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html) nationwide jumped from 5.4% to 11.1%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Plus Survey.
	+ In Massachusetts, the rate increased from 1.5% to 12.1% during that time span of the pandemic.
	+ The nationwide and statewide percentages seem to have [dropped back to pre-pandemic levels in 2024](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/demo/hhp/cycle04.html).
	+ The Household Pulse Survey between April 2-29, 2024, indicated that nationwide 4.73% of households with school-aged children reported homeschooling.
	+ The Massachusetts rate dropped to 5%.

## Employment

* 62%, or 5,165 residents 16 and older, reported being in the civilian labor force.
	+ Over half of them (58.1%) were women.
* The mean amount of time employed residents 16 and over spent commuting was 28.8 minutes.
* There were 158 “employer firms” in 2017, with 128 of them being non-veteran-owned.

# PESTEL Analysis of External Factors

A [PESTEL analysis](https://library.phoenix.edu/pestel_analysis) reviews external factors of the environment in which an organization operates.

## Political

There was an increase in book challenges and successful book bans throughout the country.

* According to the American Library Association, 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for removal from schools and libraries in 2023, and 2,571 unique titles were targeted for censorship in 2022.
* Titles representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals made up 47% of those targeted in censorship attempts, according to the ALA.
* In Massachusetts, there were 37 attempts to restrict access to physical books and 63 titles were challenged in those attempts in 2023, according to the ALA.
* Surprisingly, Massachusetts had the [fourth highest number of attempts](https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/lawmakers-weigh-standard-to-guard-access-to-library-books/3244709/) to remove books from shelves (45) in 2022, behind Texas, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, according to the ALA.

Conservative lawmakers, activists, and citizens have made headlines by speaking out and passing laws against diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) policies and initiatives, LGTBTQIA+ policies, laws, and legislation, critical race theory, reproductive freedom, and general “wokeness” since the early 2020s.

* This fueled attempts to restrict access to physical books in public library collections, especially children’s and young adult titles.
* This also prompted reviews and revisions of libraries’ materials selection policies. The Library Board of Trustees approved updates to its policy on July 12, 2022, and September 12, 2023.

In response, pending state legislation ([H 4229 / S 2528](https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/lawmakers-weigh-standard-to-guard-access-to-library-books/3244709/)) would:

* Prevent the removal of materials based on personal or political beliefs in municipal libraries
* Require libraries to incorporate the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights into their selection policies, which FML already does
* Require libraries to publicly post their updated selection policies
* Protect municipal librarians from retaliation when selections are made in good faith and in accordance with the library's selection policy

Libraries became one of the targets of shock YouTube personalities who called themselves First Amendment Auditors. These typically are “people coming into city and town halls, police stations, DPW garages, libraries and the like…to record public employees doing the people’s work,” according to the Massachusetts Municipal Association.

* The MMA and MBLC have held webinars to train library directors, staff, and trustees on how to respond to this situation.

Public interest in sustainability, environmental responsibility, and the circle economy impacts libraries in a variety of ways:

* Calls to go paperless
* Purchasing recycled paper for the copy machine
* Incorporating sustainable building practices in new construction and renovation projects
	+ [MPLCP regulations](https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/construction/files/MPLCP-regs-final-2022.pdf) to streamline the process and combat climate change
	+ Green Library Incentive
* Energy choices for building HVAC systems
* Energy efficient updates for lighting and electrical systems
* Water conservation updates to reduce water usage
* Library of things to reduce consumerism
* Physical material collections vs. electronic materials and resources

The federal and state governments have grants and mandates that encourage municipalities to adopt environmentally responsible practices to reduce carbon emissions and reach other climate and sustainability goals.

The debate over the country’s immigration policy became a state and local issue in 2023 when thousands migrants from Haiti and Latin America began arriving in Massachusetts, which triggered the state’s “right to shelter” law.

* The Rodeway Inn on East Main Street, Westminster, was chosen as a place to house these immigrants as well as homeless families.
	+ The library was approached by Making Opportunity Count (MOC) to publicize items that could be donated to the families and for several months, the library stored these items.
	+ The library ceased accepting donations in January 2024, but continued to publicize the list of needed items on behalf of the Baptist Church across the street.
	+ The state will end this approach in 2025, and families will be provided housing that’s more integrated in communities.
* The library was not a target of criticism for this role. However, there were a few social media comments that were critical of the situation in general.
* Immigration policy will be fluid during Donald Trump’s second Presidential term.

Massachusetts legislative support (Legislature and Governor’s Office) for public libraries:

* Library state aid has fluctuated in the last several years. State aid increased in 2023, but was [level-funded in 2024](https://mblc.state.ma.us/news/news-releases/2024/nr240129.php) as state tax receipts declined and COVID relief aid disappeared. The FY25 state budget [included increases](https://mblc.state.ma.us/news/news-releases/2024/nr240812.php) in state aid of more than 13%.
* Governor Healey’s Economic Development Bond Bill includes [$150,000 for MA Public Library Construction Program](https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/construction/2024-bond-bill.php).

The MA House of Representatives has pending legislation (H.3239) that would enable libraries to [purchase ebooks and digital audiobooks](https://www.everylibrary.org/new_ebook_bill_could_expand_reading_in_massachusetts) outright. Currently, libraries license these ebooks and digital audiobooks, which is expensive and limits availability. There currently is no State Senate version, but it was [referred](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD3425) to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

## Economic

Ebooks, e-magazines, and digital audiobooks are an [economic issue for public libraries](https://www.masslive.com/politics/2023/10/publishers-look-to-make-edits-to-mass-lawmakers-e-book-access-bill.html) because of how publishers negotiate contracts.

* They charge five to six times as much for an e-book compared to a hard copy and limit the length of each contract.
* This restricts the number of titles available to patrons and the length of time libraries have access to titles.
* Patrons who prefer these formats are frustrated by the lack of availability and long waitlists. They don’t understand (or care about) the root of the problem.
* Some patrons may instead opt to purchase these titles out of frustration.

State funding for libraries depends on tax revenue and the availability of federal stimulus spending. The pandemic relief funds from the federal government enabled the state to boost state aid allocations to public libraries in 2023. But ongoing reductions in state tax revenues led to proposals to level-fund state aid to libraries in 2024. However, state tax revenues rebounded in FY25, and state aid to libraries received another boost.

Inflation during 2022 hurt Americans' pocketbooks in many ways. [According to Investopedia](https://www.investopedia.com/inflation-rate-by-year-7253832), inflation reached 9.1%, a 40-year high. In response, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates, and by May 2024, inflation was at 3.3%. Both economic factors decreased people's purchasing power and many cut back on spending. Inflation was holding steady in early 2025, but it remains to be seen if prices will increase due to tariffs the Trump administration plans to impose on trade partners.

When it came to buying books, the publishers reported strong sales, indicating that the book industry is very healthy despite predictions that fewer people read books nowadays.

* Worldwide book sales have increased significantly [year-over-year since at least 2019](https://publishdrive.com/book-sales-statistics-and-market-report.html).
* Sales of print books grew nearly 250% in 2023, while sales of ebooks only increased by 48%, according to PublishDrive.com.
* Book prices have increased in recent years, which could cause low-income and frugal residents to turn to the library as an alternative source.
	+ [Driven by](https://bookriot.com/book-price-increase/) rising wages at publishers, supply chain problems for materials such as paper, increased transportation costs, etc.
	+ [Unexpected surges in demand](https://litreactor.com/columns/the-rising-price-of-everything-and-what-it-means-for-publishing) for titles ranging from the classics to new releases thanks to #BookTok on TikTok and #BookTalk Reels on Instagram and Facebook.
* Overdrive, which makes the Libby app, is among the “stores with the most significant sales in 2023 compared to 2022” with 30% sales growth, according to PublishDrive.com.

Several economic factors have caused housing costs to skyrocket, which affects homeowners and renters in Westminster and surrounding towns.

* Landlords sought to recoup rent lost during the pandemic due to government orders to keep people housed during the health emergency.
* The housing market was affected by inflation and an imbalance in supply and demand.
* [Forbes Home ranked](https://bostonagentmagazine.com/2024/11/13/massachusetts-has-one-of-the-highest-median-home-prices-in-the-u-s/) the 15 states with the highest median home prices; Massachusetts ranked No. 5.
* In Westminster, the imbalance has been caused by people fleeing the high housing costs in cities, employers' new remote work and work-from-anywhere policies, and the high quality of the AWRSD schools.

The number of rental units will be increasing in Westminster in the form of duplex-style condos as well as traditional apartment buildings for several reasons:

* Senior citizens who are homeowners want to downsize to apartments or condos, but stay in Westminster.
* [Village Center zoning](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/uploads/village_center_bylaw_presentation.pdf) allows for mixed use developments that provide space for businesses and rental units.
* More Millennials and Gen Zers are expected to prefer renting over buying single-family homes.
* The MBTA Communities housing law affects Westminster because it’s a station-adjacent community.
* The town is well under the 10% threshold of the state's Chapter 40B affordable housing law and is looking at being supportive of several affordable housing projects:
	+ 48-unit project on Adams Street
	+ Senior housing behind the Senior Center
	+ Project on former McNally’s Restaurant land
* Redevelopment of the Old Town Hall into apartments and a yet-to-be-announced business
* Apartment building being built on State Road East (Route 2A)
* Short-term rentals may no longer be an issue for the town as Airbnb/Vrbo-style renting was prohibited at the 2023 Annual Town Meeting; only registered bed-and-breakfasts are allowed to let rooms short term.

Town officials and offices are grappling with how to increase town services for the town’s growing population.

* Committee investigating where to put a new public safety building
* Ongoing concern about the student population at WES and MHS and the impact on the school and town budgets

The cost of housing is one factor that drives the ongoing discussion about livable wages in Massachusetts. A [living wage standard](https://www.epi.org/publication/epis-family-budget-calculator/) is the resources families need to make ends meet and afford basic necessities such as housing, food, health care, child care, and transportation in a given region.

* According to the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/25), adults in Massachusetts need to make double or nearly quadruple the current minimum wage of $15/hour, depending on the number of children in their household and if they are the sole breadwinner or in a dual-income family.

The finances of the town will change when the landfill managed by Waste Management closes. Revenue from the landfill has been declining for years.

Generally, the town budget makers (Advisory Board and Select Board) have supported the library’s budget and capital improvement requests. Other towns are not as lucky. In 2024, many municipalities (cities and towns alike) are cutting their budgets due to the disappearance of federal COVID relief and stimulus money (ARPA). This could lead to some libraries being decertified and those residents being unable to borrow books from FML directly or via the CW MARS catalog.

Locally, new small businesses opened up in town.

* Victoria Coffee (closed in January 2025)
* Sa More Rays
* Barber shop
* Northern Roots (took over The Beauty Shop location)
* Flutter Yen Aesthetics
* Wachusett Brewery is now [owned by Finestkind Brewing](https://www.brewbound.com/news/smuttynose-parent-company-acquires-massachusetts-wachusett-brewing/) and is continuing to operate the brew yard as usual.
* Aubuchon Hardware [joined the Ace Hardware cooperative](https://hardwareretailing.com/aubuchon-co-to-transition-to-ace-hardware/) after previously closing its distribution plant, which has been repurposed for several other businesses.
* New trades businesses like Flip Out Construction

There will be more to come.

* Based on presentations by business owners and developers at Planning Board meetings during 2023 and 2024, there will be a car wash in the Village Center and a Mexican restaurant next to the Rodeway Inn.
* The All About You spa abruptly closed, but is now occupied by an environmental firm.
* UNIFIED2 Global Packaging plans to build a box assembly facility and Home Depot wants to build a distribution center in Westminster Business Park.
	+ New source of truck traffic at the intersection of State Road East, Route 2A (State Road East), and Depot Street related to building construction and transporting corrugated boxes to customers

The popularity of online shopping before and during the pandemic fueled the warehouse boom around Massachusetts, which in turn has increased truck traffic and reliance on rail freight.

* Warehouse locations in Westminster include the former Digital Equipment Corp./Simplex headquarters on the private Simplex Drive, the former Aubuchon Hardware distribution center off of West Main Street, and a warehouse across the street from the Oakmont High/Overlook Middle entrance is right over the Ashburnham/Westminster border.
* Drastic increase in truck traffic between Overlook Drive to Bacon Street and Elliot Street as 18-wheelers travel to Route 2 via East Main Street.

The Westminster Town Clerk recorded or renewed 57 business certificates in 2023, 76 in 2022, 92 in 2021, and 59 in 2020.

Meanwhile, the staff at local newspapers have been drastically cut as a result of declining subscriptions, abundant competition for clicks to website content and advertising, and people getting most of their news from social media.

## Sociocultural

Social/emotional well-being was a concern before the COVID-19 pandemic, but grew more worrisome when the worldwide health emergency forced “the world to shut down” and people to isolate in their homes/apartments away from friends, family, co-workers, and their communities. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg noted a variety of other societal impacts in his book “2020”:

* Grief
* Long COVID
* Powerlessness
* Loneliness
* Depression
* Learning loss
* Socialization loss
* Education and career disruption
* Mistrust of individuals and institutions

FML continued to be a resource for education, culture, recreation and information despite being closed between mid-March 2020 and mid-March 2021.

* Curbside Pickup and Books on Wheels Delivery options were introduced, and additional electronic resources were purchased to help people digitally access a variety of information and cultural resources.
* The library began to [return to normalcy on March 22, 2021](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/home/news/forbush-memorial-library-availability-update), by reopening for browsing on an appointment basis and following other health and safety protocols.

Experts are sounding the alarm about the dangers of [loneliness](https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html) and [self-imposed solitude](https://www.msn.com/en-us/society-culture-and-history/social-issues/the-anti-social-century/ar-AA1xapQs). They point to the pandemic, social media, and video games as the main causes. Libraries are caught in the middle. Their community programs provide “engaged leisure,” which contributes to higher levels of well-being, and encourage solitary “sedentary leisure” through patrons’ use of their physical and digital materials.

There has been a rise in aggressive behavior and angry public outbursts.

* There were reports of customers attacking retail workers during the pandemic, many related to mask-wearing.
* Following the pandemic, there were reports of healthcare workers being attacked or threatened in hospital emergency rooms.
* Mass shootings also have been a public safety threat for decades, but peaked during the pandemic, according to the Gun Violence Archive. The more commonplace this becomes, the fewer places of refuge there seem to be.
* Road rage has been a road and public safety concern for years. Aggressive drivers became a concern during the pandemic.
* Eric Klinenberg dedicated chapter 16 of his book “2020” to the surge in violent, antisocial behavior since the pandemic.
* There also has been an increase in the number of establishments that post a customer/patient/visitor code of conduct to preempt any dangerous behavior.
	+ The Select Board voted to adopt the Town of Westminster [Visitor Code of Conduct](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/uploads/westminster_-_visitor_code_of_conduct_11.22.pdf) in November 2022.

During the spring of 2020, the nationwide protests led by Black Lives Matter activists following the murder of George Floyd by Police Officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, Minnesota, prompted many companies, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and lawmakers to reflect on the status of diversity and equity of marginalized groups and increase opportunities for inclusion.

* The ALA issued several statements including one [acknowledging ALA's role](https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/06/ala-takes-responsibility-past-racism-pledges-more-equitable-association) in perpetuating structural racism and another [condemning police violence](https://www.ala.org/news/2012/01/ala-statement-condemning-police-violence-against-bipoc-protesters-and-journalists) against BIPOC, protesters, and journalists.
* The Public Library Association, a division of the ALA, issued a statement and call to action for library staff to [become more diverse](https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/edi/calltoaction) and provide career-advancement pathways for BIPOC staff.
* The ALA provided an [“interpretation” of its Library Bill of Rights](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/EDI#:~:text=Materials%20should%20not%20be%20excluded,all%20members%20of%20the%20community.) that included guidance that “libraries should seek out alternative, small press, independent, and self-published content in a variety of formats” to increase the availability of works by “diverse authors and viewpoints.”
	+ This aligns with the original Library Bill of Rights provision: “Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.”
* The ALA also [encouraged libraries](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/culturalprogrammingtopromotediversity) to “work to bring the library to these communities through outreach and partnership efforts at cultural events, through community-based organizations, or through local media.”
* Some institutions and municipalities, including at least 3 in Massachusetts (Reading, Chelmsford, and Beverly), have published land acknowledgment statements or referred to one in some way on their websites.
* Juneteenth became a federal and state holiday.
* It sparked the countermovement, All Lives Matter.
* Then, in January 2025, an executive order issued by President Donald Trump banned federally funded diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility policies and programs.

Possibly as a result of the pandemic, people are more interested in “fresh air” activities. This includes continuing to seek out restaurants with outdoor dining as well as outdoor recreation options and experiences. Westminster residents express interest in more “walkable” streets with sidewalks, outdoor movie nights, and a pickleball court.

* In 2022, a [citizens’ petition](https://www.communitypreservation.org/home/news/cpa-adoption-update-westminster-places-cpa-spring-2022-ballot) secured a town election ballot question on whether to adopt a 3% CPA surcharge with several exemptions in hopes of raising approximately $400,000 annually for outdoor recreation, historic preservation, affordable housing, and open space projects. The CPA was narrowly defeated. The CPA Committee continues to meet regularly.

The Town of Westminster is changing to reflect this:

* Expansion and improvements to hiking trails in Hagar Park in addition to the trails, a beach, a playground, and picnic area at Crocker Pond
* Farmers Market on Academy Hill from May to October
* Bike lanes added to Route 140 from around the intersection with East Main Street to Honey Bee Lane
* Outdoor basketball and tennis courts next to Town Hall
* Landscape and hardscape design elements provide more green space, sidewalks, crosswalks, and seating in the [Village Center zone](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/uploads/village_center_bylaw_presentation.pdf)
* Westminster Village Foundation holding a Summer Concert Series on the VFW Field
* Select Board’s plan to [build a playground](https://www.westminster-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1431/f/agendas/07-06-2022_parks_recreations_committee_meeting_agenda.pdf) next to the Azarian Farm property, across from the Academy Hill Common (It is expected to be completed by June 30, 2025.)
* Talk of building youth sports fields on the Westminster Golf Course, which is for sale, or in the Old Colony Road area
* Right-to-Farm Community designation
	+ Chickens, goats, and other farm animals are common sights around town.
	+ Some residents sell fresh eggs and produce at the end of their driveways.

There has been a surge in the number of indoor recreational businesses that promote socialization and entertainment as well as activities/sports in Central MA from Leominster to Sturbridge and east to Natick.

Long before the pandemic, people could be seen fishing from the shores of or in boats in the town’s lakes and ponds. Ice fishing is so much a part of the town’s culture that the Westminster Historical Society sponsored an annual ice-fishing derby for many years.

Hunting and birdwatching have long been popular activities in the town and region.

# Technical

You could say that public libraries are at the forefront of technological change. Much of the technology people embrace they expect to find offered by their local library. Current technological trends and capabilities that libraries are [expected to embrace](https://blog.pressreader.com/libraries-institutions/public-library-trends-and-innovations-to-watch-for-in-2024) include:

* eBooks and e-magazines
* Electronic databases
* Online ordering and booking
* Online forms
* Streaming services
* Digitizing historical records
* Bridging the digital divide with education, information, programs, and services
* Embracing augmented reality and artificial intelligence

Some library of things items are technological. Hotspots and Chromebooks are two current items. Staff should know how to use them in case they need to assist patrons when borrowing an item.

Cyberattacks on public services are increasing and becoming sophisticated. Thus, public libraries are vulnerable to cyberattacks and should invest in and practice cybersecurity and redundancy to protect patron records and other library systems.

In order to be successful at embracing all of this emerging technology and to best serve patrons, the library staff should become comfortable in the role of technologist and adapt to the changes.

The number of FML patrons who read electronic content has grown. This is a national trend and partly why there is pending legislation to make digital material more affordable for public libraries, not to mention taxpayers.

* 2023 ebook checkouts increased 10% over 2022
* 2024 ebook checkouts increased 19% over 2023

The switch from Overdrive to the company’s Libby app in May 2023 was a big technological change for patrons who prefer to read books on tablets or e-readers, or listen to audiobooks on their smartphones.

The library also offers access to a variety of databases and subscription content such as Gale databases, the Boston Globe, Consumer Reports, Teachables, and CreativeBug through the website.

The library spent much of 2023 redesigning and re-platforming its website to improve navigation and access to the event calendar, room bookings, museum passes, electronic resources, and information about the library collections, history, and programs.

CW MARS has been innovating to keep up with technological advances and public expectations.

* It recently updated its online catalog interface so that it integrates with Libby and member libraries’ catalogs.
	+ The new OPAC Aspen uses FRBR (grouping records) for ease of use by patrons.
		- Staff has a good amount of control over the front end of the library’s catalog, but very little over CW MARS cataloging standards.
	+ It incorporates marketing features such as a library’s brand colors into the interface, which the staff handled.
* New technology from CW MARS can place demands on the library’s technology equipment needs. One example is the CW MARS app, which is several years old:
	+ It functions fine, but the library has 1 scanner that can scan barcodes on a phone.

Library staff must also pay attention to and learn to use marketing and promotional technology. This is because there is only one newspaper that regularly publishes the library’s calendar of events. It is building the capacity and expertise of the staff to create and publish promotional material in several digital channels. This technology includes:

* Website content management system
* Facebook and Instagram social media accounts
* Canva design software
* Software to create and manage the content schedule
* Wowbrary website widget and weekly newsletter
* Cricket poster printer
* Google Profile
* Google Analytics

# Environmental

The 150th anniversary of the original part of FML is in 2028, making the library the oldest functioning municipal building in town. It houses several important collections of artwork and historical artifacts. For these two reasons, it is important to identify environmental trends and threats that pose challenges to building stability and upkeep.

The climate of Massachusetts has been changing in the 21st century. Temperatures are generally warmer. So winter storms that used to drop only snow now tend to drop some snow, icy and even rain. Increasingly, storms produce only rain with periods of sleet and/or freezing rain. There are more heatwaves during the summers, and summers have vacillated between drought and excessively rainy.

* The Forbush has always been a beloved building in town, but now it’s important to care for the building and grounds given that these climate changes are relatively new and the original building so old.
* A storm that produced snow and then heavy rain in 2024 caused water to breach the door to the Multipurpose Room and cause extensive damage.
	+ Mitigation efforts compromised the boiler and caused it to fail, leaving the library without heat.
	+ It was an exercise in climate disaster response and took months to fix the root cause, repair/renovate the Multipurpose Room, and replace the room’s HVAC unit.
	+ The furnace is on the town’s Capital Planning list for sooner replacement.

The two beech trees in front of the library are over 100 years old and are almost as beloved as the original part of the library. Pests and climate change are the main threats these trees face.

* Beech leaf disease, which is associated with a nematode, is infecting many beeches in the western and central parts of Massachusetts, including these.
* Beech trees [thrive in climates](https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/ag_654/volume_2/fagus/grandifolia.htm#:~:text=Mean%20annual%20temperatures%20range%20from,be%20unfavorable%20for%20beech%20growth.) with temperatures ranging from 40° to 70° F, but they can survive in temperatures as low as -44° F and as high as 100° F.

The HVAC system will continue to need special attention given the:

* Increase in persistent humidity levels in Massachusetts due to climate change
* Damage to the boiler caused by the mitigation of the Multipurpose Room’s flooding in 2024 added to the previous problems with the boiler.
* Previous presence of mold in the basement (children’s room and multipurpose room)
* Preserving the artwork and artifacts housed in the library
* [MBLC collection preservation guidelines](https://guides.mblc.state.ma.us/c.php?g=936216&p=9007964) for libraries
* Need for good ventilation to minimize exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 and RSV

The library follows the objectives and requests of the town’s Energy Conservation Committee. Recent examples are the upgrade of the lighting to LED bulbs and seeking members’ input on “green” alternatives to replacing the library’s boiler.

Towns in Massachusetts are looking to apply for grants that would enable them to install charging stations for electric vehicles.

* Governor Maura Healey [pledged during her campaign](https://maurahealey.com/issues/climate/) to ban the sale of new passenger cars and light-duty trucks powered by gasoline or diesel by 2035.

Libraries could also install solar-powered device charging stations that would enable residents to charge devices like smartphones and tablets for free.

* People already seek out libraries for free access to WI-FI.

Forever chemicals, also known as PFAS and PFOS, are everywhere—the everyday products we use, furniture, firefighting foam, flame retardant clothes, paper products, and, consequently, in our water supply.

* Westminster has the unfortunate distinction of having the state’s [worst PFAS contamination](https://whdh.com/7-investigates/7-investigates-water-worries/) site in the Bean Porridge Hill Road and South Ashburnham Road area due to the forever chemicals being in the composting materials stored and sold by Mass Natural.
	+ Affected households
	+ Board of Health
	+ MA Department of Environmental Protection
* The U.S. Department of Environmental Protection has enforceable maximum contaminant levels at 4.0 parts per trillion for PFOA and PFOS, individually, for public water systems.

# Legal

New legal concerns and trends that the library needs to pay attention to relate to digital marketing. There are many existing laws and regulations to follow as well.

* Website
	+ The Assabet-powered museum pass and room reservation systems have created many opportunities to move forms, services, etc. online. But the use of digital forms, etc. has a legal impact on record-keeping and public records laws
* Social media
	+ Any content maintained in the library’s social media accounts, including anything that is edited or removed, is public record and will be archived in accordance with the Massachusetts Public Records Law.
	+ The library is responsible for responding to any public records request for social media content completely and accurately.
* Library Board of Trustees policies such as the Materials Selection Policy
* First Amendment
* Privacy laws
* Public records laws
* Open Meeting Law
* Conflicts of interest law
* Municipal budget laws and regulations