Construction on our “Phase 2” project officially began in September, 2019. Our plan included adding approximately 4000 square feet of space, and renovating all existing areas in the library. The majority of the outside work was completed in a timely manner, and the contractors were mostly doing inside work when the project was temporarily closed down due to COVID-19. Anticipating that construction could restart in a matter of weeks, staff worked to quickly pack up the entire collection and move everything out of the areas to be renovated.

Continuing the contractors’ work throughout the pandemic presented quite a few challenges and created some delays. Safety protocols limited the number of people who could be on site at one time. Starting in June, staff began to come in after contractors were done for the day, to provide contactless pickup during weekday evenings and Saturdays. As construction progressed, pickup hours increased gradually, and we are now providing contactless pickup during all hours we were open pre-COVID. While still adhering to safety protocols, staff is working diligently to unpack the library collection and set up furniture, etc. Contractors are still in and out of the building as they finish up their projects.

We are looking forward to the time when all the work is complete and we can start letting the public into the building, even if it’s on a limited basis at first. With warmer weather on the horizon, we hope to start providing outdoor programming, including a Grand Reopening Ribbon Cutting Ceremony!
When it became apparent that it would be some time before staff could work in the building, a work-from-home schedule was established. Because staff could not work their full weekly hours, we participated in the NYS Shared Work Program. This allowed operating funds to be allocated to other unanticipated expenses, such as the increased demand for costly ebooks.

Shortly after our initial closure, a special phone number was set up so staff could answer patron inquiries at home. We also instituted a new chat feature on our website, which was monitored from staff members’ homes as well. People who were isolated at home were able to apply for a library card online and obtain immediate access to a multitude of resources, such as ebooks and downloadable audiobooks, music and movies, online classes, and more. Without access to physical materials, many patrons were using our e-resources for the first time, and we were able to assist them remotely.

While working from home, staff members attended various webinars and completed tutorials to help them grow in their positions and increase their expertise with existing and new library resources. In addition, training was provided in topics such as using PPE and cleaning protocols. We began to host all of our programming online, with many of our regular groups meeting through Zoom. Our patrons were happy to be able to stay connected with their friends and neighbors.

Although we were able to get back into the building in a limited capacity in June, the ongoing construction prevented us from performing many of our regular duties. Most of our collection was in storage, and electronic equipment was packed away. We set up a makeshift circulation area in our vestibule big enough for one staff member to be in at a time. This allowed us to start ordering material from other libraries in the system, and we began to offer contactless pickup.

Highlights:

- We issued almost 300 new library cards in 2020.
- 6710 people are currently Brewster Library cardholders
- Amid stay-at-home orders, ebooks were in high demand. In 2020, 14,531 items were downloaded through digital resources, a 38.5% increase over the previous year.
- We partnered with the American Heart Association to offer blood pressure monitors to our patrons.
- Putnam County Libraries teamed up to offer this new service - Creative Bug provides thousands of award-winning art & craft video classes taught by recognized design experts and artists.
- 11,485 people attended programs in the library and online in 2019 & 2020.
- Children ages 3-10 can sign up and receive a goody bag on their special day!
- Patrons pick a genre and receive a surprise movie, along with treats and activities to go with it!
Online programming included:
- Weekly Knitting group
- Monthly Book Clubs
- Movie discussions
- Monthly History Exchange meetings
- Storytimes
- Creative Writing workshops
- Take it/Make it Crafts for adults and kids
- Art classes
- Author talks
- Concerts
- Trivia Nights
- Exercise and Yoga classes
- ESL classes
- Bilingual Google Workshops
- Homework Help
- And more!

Messages from our patrons:
“All the great team at Brewster Public Library have made a really positive contribution to my summer through these wonderful classes. I also appreciate how hard you’ve been working to keep the library open during these tough times.” ~ A.

“I’ve had much exposure to libraries. I have found that Brewster’s is the very best I’ve ever experienced in all aspects of service.” ~ S.

“The staff is always so helpful and patient. I was so happy to be able to download ebooks while isolated at home.” ~ M.

“You have been doing amazing things these past months! You should be applauded for the effort to help keep the community entertained and involved!” ~ J.