STATEMENT BY THE JYVÄSKYLÄ CITIZENS' PANEL

Recommendations by the Citizens' Panel for the update of the Jyväskylä City Strategy

Spring 2025

JYVÄSKYLÄ

INTRODUCTION

The strategy process and background to the Citizens' Panel

The City of Jyväskylä is updating its city strategy, which will guide the development of Jyväskylä from 2026 to 2029. In the course of preparing the updated strategy, the city wants to hear the views of residents on the direction in which the city should develop and what issues should be taken into account when drawing up the strategy. To this end, a citizens' panel of around 30 people was convened in the spring of 2025 to draft a statement in support of the strategy process.

Invitations to the Citizens' Panel were sent to 2500 randomly selected Jyväskylä residents aged from 14 years up. Prospective participants were asked to provide as background information their age, gender, native language, educational background and life situation. Out of 169 applicants, participants were selected based on their background information in order to yield as comprehensive a sample of Jyväskylä in miniature as possible. Tietoykkönen Oy was responsible for inviting and selecting the participants.

The Citizens' Panel met four times between April and May 2025. City experts introduced the participants to the statutory duties of the city as well as the objective and implementation of the strategy process. The Citizens' Panel drafted their statement working in small groups and collectively. In drafting the statement, the panel observed the principles of deliberative debate, including listening to different points of view, justifying one's own opinions, building common understanding, and mutual respect. The final meeting, where the statement was finalised together and adopted unanimously, was attended by 24 participants.

The panel sessions were planned out and implemented by Männikkömetsä Oy in collaboration with the City's participation services. The main facilitator of the sessions was Männikkömetsä Oy, with some small groups also facilitated by city employees. The Citizens' Panel is in part funded by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra.

The assignment of the Citizens' Panel

Jyväskylä wants to continue to be a good place to live and work for its residents. What should be at the top of the City of Jyväskylä's strategy and what goals should be reflected in it in order to steer the city's development in the right direction? Please highlight up to 5 issues that should be reflected in the priorities and objectives of the new strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CITIZENS' PANEL

The citizens' panel identified five themes that they desire to see reflected in the City of Jyväskylä's future strategy:

- Jyväskylä should promote and support the well-being, services, and employment of young people
- Jyväskylä must improve the efficiency of its business development and employment services and maintain ownership of critical utilities
- Robust, attractive, and active residential areas are the heart of Jyväskylä
- Jyväskylä must improve access to affordable sports and exercise facilities throughout the city
- Culture is an important element of Jyväskylä and its resources must be safeguarded.

For each of the five themes the panel also presented concrete development proposals or measures for the upcoming strategy term, which are set out in this statement.

The overarching theme of the statement is sustainable development

The citizens' panel is of the opinion that Jyväskylä should invest in sustainable development. The panel believes that sustainable development should be mainstreamed across the five themes selected and across all of the city's activities. From the point of view of the residents, it is obvious that a modern city must base its work on the principles of sustainable development.

Jyväskylä should promote and support the well-being, services and employment of young people.

Theme keywords

- Children and adolescents
- Wellbeing
- The community
- Employment and vitality

During the strategy term, the theme should focus on the following concrete issues:

1. Focusing support on young people, especially those in lower and upper secondary education, as they are most at risk of falling behind. It is also important to consider the role of families in supporting young people.
2. Access to youth facilities and free-of-charge leisure activities should be improved in the vicinity of schools as well across a broad range of neighbourhoods. Valuing young people's views and including them increasingly closely in activities that are relevant to them, and enabling them to act on their own initiative and in the community, for example by easing access to city facilities.
3. The City of Jyväskylä should take measures to minimise the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Young people need to be made aware of the different educational pathways available to them after upper secondary education. Services and support must be brought into closer proximity to young people.

Why do we want this issue to feature strongly in the next strategy?

The well-being of young people is crucial the future of Jyväskylä as a whole. Currently, young people struggling with their mental health are a major social problem. In Jyväskylä, the number of young people not in employment or education (NEET) is also worryingly high. In our opinion, supporting and contacting young people and their families early prevents issues and costs from snowballing later on.

We believe that education and work play a major role in the well-being of young people. The transfer of employment services to the City of Jyväskylä means that the city can play an important role in how young people gain access to work or study. Young people should have more opportunities for workshops, apprenticeships, and work experience. The City of Jyväskylä must also ensure that there are enough adults in its schools with the time and resources to keep in touch with young people. It is also our opinion that it is important to inform young people about the operations and decision-making of the City of Jyväskylä and to offer them opportunities to make an impact.

Healthy young people grow up to be adults who participate in society, build their lives in Jyväskylä, and are the taxpayers of the future. They are also the ones who will generate new ideas, develop the city, and build it up into the future. Young people need to informed about the importance of work so that they understand its meaning to their lives and to all society. For these reasons, we propose to take youth well-being seriously and make it a priority in the future city strategy.

Jyväskylä needs to improve the efficiency of its business development and employment services and maintain ownership of critical utilities.

Theme keywords

- Bolstering the business environment
- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Vitality
- Ownership steering
- Education

During the strategy term, the theme should focus on the following concrete issues:

1. The operating environment for businesses must be bolstered in order to create new jobs in Jyväskylä (for example, through zoning, premises, and training).
2. The City of Jyväskylä should retain its ownership of and decision-making power over critical water, electricity, and waste management operations. No city possessions pertaining to these operations should be sold off. The prices for services related to these critical utilities must remain affordable to residents.
3. Vocational and employment training should be needs-driven and increasingly organised in partnership with businesses.

Why do we want this issue to feature strongly in the next strategy?

Creating jobs in the Jyväskylä region is crucial for the future and vitality of the city. At the beginning of 2025, employment and vitality services have become the responsibility of municipalities following the TE reform. We believe that the reform should be seen as an opportunity to reform and develop services. It is our opinion that the current mode of services is not working for either jobseekers or entrepreneurs.

We believe it is very important to invest in supporting employment and entrepreneurship considering the high unemployment rate in Jyväskylä. Unemployment has a negative and wide-ranging impact on both individuals and society. Jyväskylä possesses strong educational institutions and a lot of know-how, so we encourage the city, businesses, and education providers to discuss what kind of know-how is needed in business and how it could be better utilised.

We believe that the water, electricity, and waste management operations should remain under the ownership and control of the city. This is important for security of supply, cost control, as well as the environment. We believe that under city ownership, price increases will remain more reasonable. If prices do need to be increased, it will be easier for residents to understand the price increases when services are owned and managed by the city.

Strong, attractive, and active residential areas are the heart of Jyväskylä.

During the strategy term, the theme should focus on the following concrete issues:

1. The development of the city and the planning of its service network should ensure that all residential areas have access to the basic services needed for a good life: schools, shops, parks, libraries, sports facilities, meeting places, and accessible nature.
2. Residential areas must offer the essentialfamily services: affordable day care, primary schools, and family exercise facilities.

Theme keywords

- Villages and residential conditions
- Community spirit and activity
- Basic services

Why do we want this issue to feature strongly in the next strategy?

Making Jyväskylä a more pleasant place to live and more community-oriented will benefit every resident of the city. Investing in these aspects is a major attraction and retention factor for Jyväskylä. Strengthening a shared sense of comfort and community also helps create a safe environment for children to grow up in, which will carry on into the future.

We believe that Jyväskylä's attractiveness is enhanced if its services are not centralised to excess. For families with children, it is important that primary schools and nursery schools are evenly maintained in all residential areas. Retail stores and libraries should also be close by, as they are important basic services for a good daily life.

As Jyväskylä grows, we believe it is important that infill development preserves the surrounding nature in the best possible way. Nature adds beauty to a residential areas' environment, increases the value of homes, attracts people to exercise, and provides places to cool off as summers become hotter. As a rule, people want to live close to nature given the choice. Getting out and about in nature increases wellbeing in the lives of residents. The development of the Jyväskylä City Centre should focus on bolstering security.

We also desire that the City of Jyväskylä will promote the development of a sense of community in different residential areas. Community lets people feel more comfortable in their homes and strengthens their commitment to their neighbourhood. When people feel an area is a good home for them, they take better care of it. We see residents' associations as an important player in building an amenable, communal neighbourhood and organising events therein.

Jyväskylä should improve the accessibility of affordable sports and exercise facilities throughout the city.

During the strategy term, the theme should focus on the following concrete issues:

1. The city should offer free-of-charge and low-cost physical activity opportunities and bring them closer to residents, for example by organising weeklong tryout and thematic events.
2. The city should communicate about sports and exercise facilities and nature activity destinations in a more effective, targeted and more varied manner.

Theme keywords

- Sports and exercise facilities and opportunities
- Wellbeing

Why do we want this issue to feature strongly in the next strategy?

Sports an exercise support the wellbeing of everyone in Jyväskylä and prevent health issues. Lack of exercise is a major social issue in Finland. In our opinion, the City of Jyväskylä has an excellent opportunity to improve the physical activity facilities of its residents and encourage an active lifestyle.

Everyone should have an equal opportunity to exercise. Jyväskylä already has good and varied sports facilities, but they need to be further developed. In particular, we would like to see more opportunities for daily exercise, nature activities, as well as sports and exercise in our own neighbourhoods. We also want local residents and actors to be involved in the development of, for example, nature activity facilities, because investing in them benefits everyone in Jyväskylä.

It is good that Jyväskylä has invested significantly in physical activity facilities. However, we believe that when developing sporting facilities, the emphasis should be on maintaining the level of affordable sports and exercise facilities (such as school gyms and outdoor sports facilities).

In order to make physical activity opportunities as accessible as possible for all Jyväskylä residents, the city must subsidise facilities for sports and exercise, with a special regard for children, young people, and families. We also desire that the fees and parking charges for sporting facilities will be kept reasonable and that less-used facilities will be available at a lower cost. This would make sports services more accessible to all.

Culture is an important element of Jyväskylä and its resources must be safeguarded.

During the strategy term, the theme should focus on the following concrete issues:

1. The resources for cultural services must be ensured at least at their current level.
2. The infrastructure of the cultural sector, such as affordable premises, must be secured in order to provide for a wide range of cultural activities. Such infrastructure creates an environment that attracts residents, businesses, and creates jobs.

Theme keywords

- Culture and events
- Wellbeing
- Vitality and the economy

Why do we want this issue to feature strongly in the next strategy?

Culture is an important element of Jyväskylä's urban life and its future. The city should promote local culture and cultural history, without neglecting international influences. This will allow Jyväskylä to increase its desired attractiveness, appeal, and retention power.

Jyväskylä already possesses a diverse and open-minded cultural life where there is something for everyone. It is important that culture is available to people of different ages and coming from different backgrounds in Jyväskylä. The City of Jyväskylä should support the ”light culture” emerging from residents and communities, along with supporting residents' associations and volunteer activities in organising neighbourhood and village events.

In our opinion, culture has a clear link to the vitality of Jyväskylä. A reputation as a city of culture attracts residents, businesses, and jobs. Investing in culture also bolsters tourism: for example, Alvar Aalto and architecture now bring tourists and money to Jyväskylä. Events also play an important role in boosting vitality and attractiveness: for example, the City of Light and the Yläkaupungin Yö events attract both residents and out-of-towners.

In addition to providing vitality, culture is a source of mental fortitude and recreation for residents. Cultural experiences improve the wellbeing of Jyväskylä residents, provide a counterbalance to work, and add meaning to their lives. The Adult Education Centre, in particular, has an important role to play in shaping these experiences.