

Dear people of Jyväskylä!

The year that is coming to an end has been absolutely exceptional. Covid-19 showed us how a single virus can quickly change the life in the entire world. It also showed how close Finland and Jyväskylä are to the world around us.

We heard the first news of the virus from China quite exactly one year ago. In Jyväskylä, the disease arrived in the beginning of March. Shortly afterwards, the Emergency Powers Act was applied in Finland for the first time after World War II. Our daily lives changed, but thanks to the changes made, we survived the first wave of the pandemic with moderate damage.

During the autumn, we have seen the virus spreading again. In Jyväskylä, too, on two occasions, the infection rates rose to high levels also compared with the rest of the country.

Both times, we managed to get the figures down fast. Thanks are due to the staff of our health services, whose work has made it possible to trace the chains of transmission exceptionally well, and this way we have been able to target the recommendations and restrictions effectively.

Thanks are also due to all the people of Jyväskylä who have followed the recommendations well.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, it has been great to notice the strong sense of community that we have here in Jyväskylä. In the spring, when the over-70s had to stay home, a large number of volunteers offered to do their shopping. Families learned new ways to keep in touch with their grandparents, even though visiting was not allowed. Many employees shifted to telecommuting, events became virtual, and party arrangements were reinvented. Circumstances changed, but we adapted.

I have been asked many times during the year how the city survives amidst the pandemic. How will the economy survive when Covid-19 takes all the tax revenues and in addition to caring for the sick, we must spend money on testing and tracing?

I want to emphasize that the city will be fine. But many people living here are distressed. Some have lost their dear ones, others their health. Many have lost their jobs, either permanently or temporarily.

Some entrepreneurs have lost their life's work. The city will be fine. Our task is to take care of the well-being of the residents, and the city economy has not suffered extensively as a result of the coronavirus pandemic - thanks, among other things, to the extensive state support.

I know that many are already tired of Covid-19. They would rather not hear any more news on the pandemic, and they do not really want to put on the face mask every time they go shopping. This is understandable, sometimes I am tired too.

But we should still persevere. At the turn of the year, we are reaching the home stretch that will continue all spring. If we can still follow the recommendations and comply with the restrictions, a large proportion of the population will be vaccinated, and we will be able to tackle the disease.

Dear listeners.

It is good to note that even this year, there was more to life than just Covid-19. It is important that our city's strong growth continued. The basis for growth is still the fact that Jyväskylä is an attractive city of study. It will be further strengthened in the autumn when it will be possible to do master's studies in engineering in Jyväskylä. This is great news also for the business community in the region.

New jobs, diverse housing opportunities and well-functioning services have also attracted new residents. So there are now 1,200 more of us living in Jyväskylä than at the beginning of the year.

Even in Jyväskylä, the pandemic weakened employment in the service sector in particular. Compared to other large cities, however, unemployment has risen only moderately. In general, our businesses have survived the pandemic better than average, and the technology industry has done exceptionally well. Construction has also remained strong.

Many things also progressed in the city decision-making. In November, the city council approved of the renewed plans for the Hippos Project. The project is of great importance to the city, as it will create the most significant concentration of exercise, sports and related know-how and research in the Nordic countries in Jyväskylä. If all goes well, construction will begin already in the autumn. Years of planning will turn into reality.

The progress of the Hippos project does not mean that we would forget the other sports venues in the city.

On the contrary, in the beginning of next year, we will prepare a sports venue program together with the clubs to improve the conditions for different sports, both for amateurs and competitors, in the spirit of the capital of sports. At the same time, it is worth remembering that local sports venues, ski trail, and hiking trail networks are still the most important services for the residents. We will continue to keep them in good condition.

The final report of the Jyväskylän Sydän (Heart of Jyväskylä) project, published late in the year, includes several measures to develop the city's cultural life. A decision has already been made on the renovation of the theatre building designed by Alvar Aalto. The Lyceum building will also be renovated, and the development of the block will start. The conditions for deciding on the concert hall were not met, but the excellent Jyväskylä Sinfonia will get better premises either in the theatre building or in the Paviljonki Centre. Jyväskylä will continue to be a strong city of culture. We will make sure of that, not only to improve the well-being of the residents but also to increase the attractiveness of the city.

Dear listeners.

The year that is about to begin is also the year of municipal elections. One of the key questions for the coming election period is how, in the difficult economic situation, we will be able to provide high-quality services to our residents. At the same time, we should strengthen Jyväskylä's position as one of the country's growth centres - which are becoming few and far between. In addition to major strategic decisions, city councillors make decisions on many issues that affect our daily lives. So, it is worthwhile to vote and also to stand as a candidate. Despite claims to the contrary, even one single city councillor can have a significant impact on the decisions made by the city.

The attractiveness of our city has remained good even under the exceptional circumstances. This gives us a strong belief in the future. People want to come here, and they want to stay here. We have all the prerequisites to ensure that Jyväskylä continues to be the most attractive growth centre in Finland between Tampere and Oulu.

Personally, after a different year, I look forward to the future with confidence. The first healthcare workers will soon be vaccinated in Jyväskylä, and a plan on how to vaccinate the population will soon be completed. This way our daily lives will slowly return to their normal course. I believe that next year, when standing here, I will be able to say that we have put it all behind us. Dear people of Jyväskylä.

A very Happy New Year to you all!