

New Year's Address by the Lord Mayor 01.01.2021

My dear fellow citizens,

Dear citizens of Pforzheim,

First of all, I would like to wish you all a happy new year 2021.

No one can say how good it will be, but I am absolutely sure it will be better than the old one.

2020 will go down in the history books as the year of the Corona pandemic.

None of us could have even imagined a year ago how the pandemic would turn our lives upside down.

None of us could have imagined the circumstances under which we celebrated Christmas and even New Year's Eve.

None of us would have thought that we would not have a New Year's reception in 2021.

We are in the third week of the lockdown, which has slowed our public life back down to virtually zero.

This is a massive intrusion on our fundamental rights and no one, certainly no policymaker, wanted it.

Nevertheless, I called for it in early December because I saw no other realistic way, and until now I see no other way, to bring our infection numbers back down to a manageable level.

The impact on the economy, especially the retail sector, but also the gastronomy and hospitality industry, just think of the bar and club owners, and the cultural workers has been and continues to be massive. For more than a few, the pandemic threatens their very existence.

As a municipal administration, we will do everything in our power to mitigate the consequences of the lockdown. We already started doing this in the spring, with our emergency funds for Pforzheim businesses and associations and our "Handeln für Pforzheim" (German for: Trading/Acting for Pforzheim) voucher platform, which you can continue to use to support local businesses. You can find it at www.handeln-fuer-pforzheim.de

In addition, we have suspended and also partially waived rent and lease receivables, and the same applies to special use fees for outdoor seating and sales areas. We support companies, associations and event organizers in word and deed, be it in the preparation of hygiene

concepts, in the application for federal or state funds or in general questions regarding the current Corona requirements. The administration was and is always approachable for the citizens.

Pforzheim got through the first wave in the spring very well. Without the intense outbreak at a large meat processing company in the region, our numbers would have been even lower. Then summer came and everything seemed fine. Until October, I was firmly convinced that we would have a Christmas market.

But we became careless. I don't exclude myself from that, after all, I caught it too.

My wife and I were lucky. Our illness was relatively mild. But I can assure you, it was no fun. Even today, I still feel the after-effects of my Covid disease.

But as I said, we were still lucky. Many others were not. This deadly virus has also claimed lives in Pforzheim and the Enzkreis region.

As a representative of all the victims, I would like to take this opportunity to remember Ralf Fuhrmann, who died of Covid-19 in mid-November. As a local councillor and physician, he worked for decades on behalf of the people in our city. He knew the risks very well and yet never doubted for a second his duty to help. He paid for his commitment with his life.

Our thoughts are with all those who have lost a loved one and with those who fear for the life of such a person at this moment.

I see it as my primary duty to protect the health of our citizens. We work tirelessly on this in close coordination with the health department and the Enzkreis district administration. The administrative staff of the city of Pforzheim (Verwaltungsstab) has already met over 60 times, assessing the current situation and deciding on countermeasures. No matter whether on weekends or late in the evening, when we were once again waiting for the latest Corona ordinance from the state Baden-Württemberg, which was to apply the very next day. Regardless of whether a test center, a fever outpatient clinic, a quarantine facility or a district vaccination center had to be set up within a very short time, the members of the staff and the rest of the administration have always accepted and mastered the challenge. And I'm really proud of that, and I also thank each and every employee for that from the bottom of my heart.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have an outstanding city administration that has proven itself in this crisis and will continue to do so. I guarantee you that!

Of course, this applies not only to our fight against the pandemic, no, it also applies to our actual core task of moving the city of Pforzheim forward.

Yes, there are many other issues besides Corona that concern us as an administration, but most of all you, as citizens. We will defeat the pandemic and there will be life after Corona. We don't yet know exactly what that life will look like, but we still need to start thinking about it and setting the course for a better future.

This is also what we have done in the past year.

Right at the beginning of the year 2020, we made a breakthrough with our pool situation. There will be a new swimming pool building in Huchenfeld, with a children's paddling pool,

and there will also be a new pool in the city center. Planning is in full swing and the excavators will be rolling before the end of the year. This will be the first visible sign that we are moving forward again with our pools after years of standing still.

Some of you may have listened attentively to this wording.

Aha, he's marching again, the Boch. We've heard that before.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I am leading the way. That is my job as a Lord Mayor. And yes, I also marched to Klapfenhardt because I thought it was the right thing to do.

And last year, together with the municipal council, I came to a crossroad where the decision had to be made as to where we should all march on together: To Klapfenhardt or to Ochsenwäldle.

That's why we prepared the necessary information for the municipal council and, of course, also pointed out the hurdles in terms of nature conservation and species protection law. It turned out that these are very high in both areas.

On the base of the available findings and in view of the signals from the council, I then spoke out in favor of the Ochsenwäldle and the majority of the council supported this. We still have a rocky road ahead of us and it is far from clear whether we will end up with a new, urgently needed industrial park. But I am marching in front again!

Of course, the environmental aspect also played a very important role in the discussion about this new industrial park. At the Round Table on Industrial Sites that I convened, the environmental associations involved rightly pointed out the importance of the forests, and this was also addressed accordingly in the council.

Climate protection is a task for the society as a whole, which we as the municipal administration of Pforzheim naturally take on. For this reason, far-reaching decisions were also made in this area last year. For example, we adopted a climate action plan, set up a mobility advisory council, established a climate partnership with the city of Mtwarna in Tanzania, and launched the "One child - one tree" tree-planting campaign, under which a tree will be planted for every child born in Pforzheim in the future.

We have also passed another milestone in the area of our project Innenstadtentwicklung Ost with the adoption of the development plan. As early as the first quarter of this year, construction work will begin that will bring lasting change to our eastern city center.

Of course, we have also continued to press ahead with the future topic of Smart City. Corona has clearly shown us here how important digitization is for our society today. Here I would like to mention the renewal of our free PF-WLAN (public wifi), but also our efforts in network expansion and in upgrading our schools.

There was also no Corona break in the further expansion of childcare. We have continued to push ahead with expansion in both the daycare and after-school care sectors.

The same applies to schools. Here, improving digital equipment is the top priority, but at the same time we must also continue to push ahead with structural measures. This includes renovations, such as those currently underway at the Reuchlin Gymnasium, as well as new

buildings and extensions. Keyword Insel-Campus. We had a special meeting on this and there is a clear political will to tackle this major project in the new year.

And there was no standstill in our local districts either, despite Corona.

In Büchenbronn, work began on the expansion of the Fuchsbau daycare center and on the second construction phase of the new town hall square (Rathausplatz).

In Eutingen, the long-awaited extension and reconstruction of Enzstraße will start this year. At the same time, plans are underway for a far-reaching redesign of the Insel site, where I see the new sports hall for our largest district.

Hohenwart is currently very busy with the issue of local supply. A village shop association has now been founded here, which we as a town will of course support to the best of our ability. I would also like to send my heartfelt thanks to Hohenwart for the great cooperation in implementing the quarantine facility.

I would also like to extend such thanks to the people and associations in Huchenfeld. Here, as in the spring, we have again set up a fever outpatient clinic in the Hochfeldhalle. And as already mentioned, there has been significant progress in the construction of the new swimming pool.

In Würm, the new fire station is currently being built, but one of the main topics this year was certainly the SWP survey on interest in gas and fiber optic connections. The response so far has been very encouraging. At the beginning of the year 2020, I was able to deliver the good news about the renovation of the roof of the Leutrumgarde at the carnival.

Was there anything else? Oh, that's right. We have set up and passed a new one-year budget for our city. At this point, I would like to expressly thank the members of the city council for the constructive and fair digital budget discussions. As well, of course, as my Finance Director and First Mayor Dirk Büscher, as well as the City Treasury team led by Konrad Weber and everyone involved in drawing up the budget.

Yes, it has become a Corona budget because we currently have to drive on sight, but it is nevertheless a budget for the future that ensures that Pforzheim can continue to develop.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the end of my speech, I must return to the subject of the corona pandemic.

Yes, we are experiencing dark hours at the moment, but they will pass. We will get through them together and win our fight against the pandemic in the end. They say the night is always darkest just before dawn. And the dawn will come.

In less than two weeks we will be able to start vaccinations in Pforzheim and that is a big step forward, out of the pandemic. Everything will not be good again overnight, but it will get better bit by bit.

And finally, I would like to thank those who have been at the forefront of our fight against Covid-19 for months now, day in and day out. I would like to leave the stage to you now, because you have been with us through the pandemic and have sustained us.