

Budget for 2026 – Statement by Guy Weirich

I would like to analyze this budget above all from the perspective of *vivre ensemble* (*living together*). By this I do not mean the commission of the same name that we have. Rather, I mean that the concept of *VIVRE ENSEMBLE* ultimately summarizes what a municipality is about. On this point, I fully agree with certain fundamental statements made by members of the majority in their various contributions. After all, the budget is meant to create the basis for allowing us to live well and live together in our municipality. This implies the goal of enabling both individuals and, of course, the entire community of citizens to enjoy a good life here in Bertrange. This requires material conditions; it requires social cohesion, inclusion, economic and ecological foundations, a sensitivity to spiritual matters, as well as projects related to leisure and everything that addresses people's well-being in the broadest sense of the word—or, as the Mayor put it, “subjective well-being.”

I. Education

I will begin with schooling, an essential aspect of this perspective.

In the RTL broadcast of November 19, Minister Meisch answered questions on bilingual literacy and emphasized at least twice: “We need more space in primary schools. In the future, we will also need more space for *précoce*.” The Mayor previously spoke of a study examining school infrastructure and of a master plan, which allows for long-term planning. In the short term, according to the Mayor's statements during the preparation of this meeting, we supposedly had no problem. His explanation at the time was entirely plausible. However, on Tuesday we were informed that a class was being housed in the teachers' lounge. Is this true? Or is it a rumor? If it is true: what is the reason? How long has this been or is this the case? Do we once again have a shortage of classrooms?

Regardless of this, we will soon, as announced, be able to make use of the infrastructure “Bei der Péitruß.” There are eight rooms there which are to be renovated and then made available. The budget provides €230,000 for this. We are therefore trying to position ourselves well.

A few questions in this regard:

- What exactly is planned for this infrastructure? What does “renovation” mean in concrete terms?
- To what extent were teachers involved?
- Are these standard classrooms or specialized rooms?
- For which cycle are they intended?
- What timeline has been set for this renovation?
- Is it planned to relocate the *Art de la Parole* courses there as well? Or will these courses possibly take place in the old music hall, which is supposed to be opened for other activities in the future?

With regard to schools in general, I would like to briefly address the *projets pédagogiques*. Here I received very positive feedback from the teaching staff:

- regarding the garden project for children, and
- regarding the singing project in cooperation with the UGDA.

I was also told something I was particularly pleased to hear: “It would be nice if a similar pedagogical project could also be implemented in the field of visual arts.” You know me — and you can imagine that this made me happy. In short: there is a demand to promote other art forms more systematically alongside music and singing. Art is a multifaceted subject that would allow for a great deal of variety in such a project. This would be entirely in line with the previously expressed desire to give art a higher priority. Art does not have to be understood solely as painting. How about, for example, a pedagogical project in the field of film? I also fondly recall the *Tiny Books* project, which we carried out very successfully several years ago together with several classes and their teachers.

Regarding pedagogical projects, a reimbursement of €17,500 in favor of the municipality is provided for under ordinary revenue. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine how much the pedagogical singing project costs the municipality in total.

II. Culture

This brings us to culture, another important component of our lives and our living together.

In principle, I welcome the importance that culture has in the municipality and the fact that this is reflected in the budget.

I would like to focus in particular on the **ARCA**. The first thing that stands out is the budget item *Cachets d’artistes* (3/836, p. 113):

- in 2020, this item amounted to €24,000;
- in the rectified 2022 budget, €40,000;
- in 2024, €88,322.83;
- for 2025, €110,000 were planned;
- and for 2026, we are now rising to €192,000.

This amount has therefore almost doubled within two years. One could also say: next year, our cultural service will have eight times more funds available for artists’ fees than in 2020. That makes a difference — it allows for real work. This investment aims at a qualitative leap, possibly also a quantitative expansion of the offering. If the latter is the case, I would like to make the following remarks:

1. In our view, the ARCA should continue to remain sufficiently available for our cultural associations and for initiatives that emerge from within the population.
2. We should not give up existing trump cards due to lack of space or overbooking. One example from recent years is the international BOOK ON festival. The first edition took place here in Bertrange. After that, however, the festival was no longer given priority, and it has since moved via Strassen to the Stadtgrund — to Neumünster — with great success. The potential of this festival for Bertrange and its reputation was unfortunately probably misjudged.

In the draft budget for the ARCA, we also see that expenditures for certain items increase from around €18,900 in 2024 to €95,200 — an increase of over 500%. Compared to 2025, this is almost triple. This increase certainly follows the logic of the higher artists' fees.

615100	Frais de marketing et de publicité	18 895,36	34 000,00	34 000,00	95 200,00
615100/99001	Catalogues et imprimés et publications - ARCA	17 347,46	30 000,00	30 000,00	92 200,00
	Publicité ARCA	36.000 €			
	Affiches, flyers	56.200 €			

Nevertheless, several questions arise:

1. Which concrete events or objectives justify this massive increase?
2. We were somewhat surprised by the strong emphasis on catalogs and printed materials. In recent times, digitalization has been promoted above all. Has there been a rethink here? Perhaps the realization that, for the time being, we cannot entirely do without paper. Do relatively few people perhaps consult the Enjoy agenda to obtain additional information about the various events? Expenditure for the Enjoy campaign remains stable at €40,000 for next year.

Two suggestions in this regard:

1. It would be time to offer an **annual subscription** for the ARCA, for example three or four events at a reduced price, in order to support the upswing and build long-term audience loyalty.
2. The **cooperation** with another cultural venue that was discussed earlier should now be implemented — specifically with the Cube in Marnach. This would allow programs to be exchanged and the visibility of the ARCA to be increased, with possible financial benefits for both venues.

Personally, I am pleased that the **Bayota** and the promotion of young talent are being maintained, that the importance of the festival has been appropriately recognized by the municipal council, and that the budget is doubled compared to 2024.

BAYOTA - frais divers de fonctionnement - ARCA	24 584,02	45 000,00	38 000,00	50 000,00
Frais divers d'organisation				
Règlement "Bayota - Festival des jeunes talents", "Concours pour jeunes solistes", "Jonk Organisten", "D'Jugend moolt", cc 04.03.2022				

In conclusion on this point, I would like to ask for an explanation of two more budget items:

a) What exactly is meant by ...

613481	Honoraires de consultance externe et d'expertise	0,00	0,00	0,00	17 000,00
613481/99001	Honoraires de consultance externe et d'expertise	0,00	0,00	0,00	17 000,00
	Centres culturels et salles de fête - honoraires				

b) Is the involvement of experts to be understood as part of the normal and prescribed *mise en conformité* procedure, following the various changes we have made to the hall, or are we dealing

with deficiencies? Is it known concretely what we may have to expect in the context of the *mise en conformité*?

613481	Honoraires de consultance externe et d'expertise	0,00	0,00	0,00	58 000,00
613481/99001	Honoraires de consultance externe et d'expertise	0,00	0,00	0,00	58 000,00
	Mise en conformité salle de musique				

III. Security and Civil Protection

My next point concerns the chapter on security, for which almost half a million euros are provided in the budget—for our *agents municipaux* and for the CGDIS.

3	Ordre et sécurité publics	0,00	483 967,43
---	---------------------------	------	------------

People repeatedly talk about *faits divers* that they perceive as very unpleasant and that cause them concern. In addition, there are incidents that find their way into the press. Unfortunately, both contribute to a general feeling of insecurity, which is not necessarily conducive to good living and living together.

I wonder whether, as a municipality, we could not make one or two additional efforts here — with the help of our municipal officers — well aware that not everything is within our own power. One cannot fully illuminate every dark corner.

With regard to security, however, my main concern is what has recently been discussed at the national level: **civil protection**. The aim is to make municipalities more resilient in the future as part of a national strategy and to draw up local resilience plans.

My questions in this regard:

- What is the view of the Board of Aldermen on a local resilience plan?
- How far have considerations progressed in our municipality?
- What timeframe has the Board of Aldermen set itself?
- Or: is something already provided for in the budget, even if the term “resilience” is not explicitly mentioned?

I can answer one point myself: **flooding**. In recent years, much has already been invested here, and further projects are underway. Investments have been and are being made in numerous retention basins as well as in the sewer system in various streets: rue de la Pétrusse, rue de Mamer and the surrounding area. Today it was also announced that rue Rilspert will be renovated. This is logical, as it connects directly to rue de la Pétrusse, and for many residents of rue Rilspert this fulfills a long-held wish. Overall, these are major projects that have our full support.

A particularly important project is the **Hiermesweiher with its dam**, in order to be able to control large volumes of water during heavy rainfall. We in the opposition support this project and hope that agreement has been reached — or will soon be reached — with all property owners so that this project can be implemented as quickly as possible in the interest of safe coexistence. The Mayor has expressed optimism in this regard.

However, we must not forget **other critical points**. We repeatedly receive complaints from the Cité am Bruch. There, it does not take a hundred-year flood — during heavy rain, people have water in their basements or garages.

My questions in this respect:

- What do our experts or our *bureau d'études* say about the situation in the Cité am Bruch?
- What options do we have there to improve the sewer system?

As a municipality, we grant subsidies for many things.

- Could we not take up the proposal of that citizen who is advocating for his neighbors in the Bruch and suggested granting a subsidy if backflow preventers are installed retroactively, in order to provide concrete help to those affected?

A local resilience plan, however, goes beyond flood protection. As far as civil protection is concerned, further questions remain open — at least as far as I can judge (circular from the Minister of the Interior – PowerPoint: flooding, pandemic, nuclear accident, plans and exercises ...).

The 2026 budget was described by the Mayor as a “budget of peace.” Yes — and we hope it remains so. But sometimes we are taught otherwise, or rather: something worse. My generation considered many things impossible. We must learn again to be vigilant and prepared. A resilience plan is urgently needed in many areas.

IV. Citizen Participation and Living Together

The standards Bertrange sets for itself are high. They were recently formulated on a special page in the *Luxemburger Wort* as follows: Bertrange promises future fellow citizens “a future-proof living environment for the entire living space, secured by the municipality.” That defines the ambition, and it is our shared task to do our best to live up to it.

This would actually be a nice concluding remark for my statement — but there are still further aspects of *vivre ensemble* that are close to my heart. I therefore ask for a little more patience.

We do not live in a patriarchal system in which it is dictated from above what constitutes a good life and living together in Bertrange. That is why, in addition to the commissions, there are official information and discussion meetings with citizens. I was pleased to hear that a structure is to be created in which our senior citizens can participate more actively.

We in the opposition also seek dialogue with people, listen, and receive a great deal of feedback. The last **citizens' meeting** we organized took place in **Helfent**. We sent you all the results in a memorandum. This makes it clear what concerns people, where the shoe pinches, and what is important for their daily lives. They also make very concrete suggestions on how life and coexistence in Helfent and in Bertrange could be improved. I will not go into all the details here — that would go too far. Therefore, only a few general reflections and examples.

In the budget, there are repeatedly smaller items that can be used to respond to citizens' concerns. It is important to take their needs seriously and, where swift action is possible, to respond quickly.

One example: traffic-calming measures were implemented this year in the Wénkel. This could certainly have been done earlier—the residents had been calling for this for years. A faster response would have spared the people on site a lot of annoyance.

I also know that not everything falls within the municipality's jurisdiction. However, the Board of Aldermen knows who is responsible. In the interest of citizens and the general public, the municipality can take on a mediating role, for example:

- with *Ponts & Chaussées* when zebra crossings or traffic lights are needed on a state road, as the residents of Helfent have requested;
- or with boards of directors when problems arise in a senior citizens' facility.

However, the truth also includes the fact that citizens themselves must take responsibility. For example, there are complaints about litter. But when I find the remains of a nighttime party in the morning near the benches on the bridge between the Centre Atert and the preschool, I am surprised — because right next to them are three trash bins, and a fourth is located in front of the preschool. It does not take much effort to leave this place clean. Four trash bins in one spot are a luxury — but they are of no use if they are not used. In other places, however, two trash bins instead of one would certainly make sense.

This brings me to the **printing costs** of the municipal newsletter and other publications, for which €150,000 are budgeted. I could imagine that funds are also reserved here to repeat certain necessary information throughout the year (*repetitio est mater studiorum*). Especially in the area of cleanliness, a larger campaign could once again be launched under the slogan “Keep Bertrange clean!” As a reminder: many useful pieces of information on waste can be found in the brochure “*Gutt zesumme liewen,*” which was distributed in 2021 and 2023 and is still available on our website.

Some information needs to be communicated more frequently today. For example, I have noticed that there are uncertainties about the on-demand bus (**Ruffbus**) — an excellent service for which we as the CSV advocated early on and which is budgeted for 2026 at €315,000 (3/441 Ruffbus). The service is highly appreciated. People from Helfent therefore wish for the service to be extended to Sundays, so that older and less mobile people have better access to the center and can break their isolation. Others say that the *Ruffbus Berti* should be allowed to go to Klinik Eich. For me, Klinik Eich belongs to the CHL; it is one of the four buildings of the CHL. I hope that is correct — if so, this should be communicated (again) to the people.

In addition to positive points, I would also like to address an issue that has caused unrest: a decision regarding a **cours de loisir**. Without going into detail, it can be said that personnel decisions require a great deal of sensitivity. The Mayor said at the outset that one can make mistakes and learn from them. That is true: we all make mistakes, and no one loses face by admitting them and drawing the necessary consequences.

V. Housing Shortage

The housing shortage is a major issue. In Bertrange, areas for construction have repeatedly been created, and recently we have been investing more heavily in affordable and social housing. Numerous projects are underway, and it would be desirable to make good progress in terms of timelines.

One question: do we know how many apartments in Bertrange are vacant? I was told: “alarmingly many.” Nationwide, the *Mouvement écologique* speaks of 5 to 15%. It is not always necessary to

build new — existing building stock can also be used. Here, social and ecological aspects intersect. It is a sensitive topic, but it would certainly make sense to take action here.

On the basis of the rental law (Art. 27), the municipal council can oblige owners of vacant apartments to report them to the municipal administration. I am not a fan of such obligations, but it might nevertheless be sensible

- to appeal once again to owners,
- to launch an information campaign,
- and to provide renewed information about options such as *location sociale*, whereby apartments can be made available temporarily.

VI. Center for Ecology and Solidarity

Since I have already linked social issues and ecology, I would like once again, on behalf of our group, to point out a project we are convinced of and that can make an important contribution: the CENTER FOR ECOLOGY AND SOLIDARITY.

In the *ecological* field, the center would have the task of involving citizens in taking responsibility — both in the implementation of the Climate Pact and the Nature Pact. Concrete possibilities include information, advice, courses, and exhibitions on the environment, biodiversity, and animal protection. A local second-hand shop, a swap exchange, and the hosting of the repair café would also be conceivable. Another goal would be the fight against the “take-make-waste” economy. The principle of “produce, consume, discard” is to be replaced by the promotion of a circular economy.

In the area of *solidarity*, togetherness and a dignified life — also beyond one’s own immediate surroundings — would be at the center. Conceivable initiatives include a social shop, a food-sharing point, a contact point for integration and reintegration into the labor market, meeting spaces for different groups, or simply a café for informal meetings and board games.

VII. International Solidarity and Closing Remarks

The seventh and final point builds on the idea of “looking beyond one’s own plate.” *Vivre ensemble* also means taking responsibility beyond the borders of one’s own municipality. In a globalized world, we are all in the same boat.

The budget includes several valuable projects in this regard:

- town partnerships with three partner municipalities to promote European cohesion (3/140: €130,000),
- aid for people in disaster areas (€25,000 annually),
- support for projects in countries with concrete financial needs, such as in 2025 the *What Water* project in Cameroon (€30,000).

For 2016, under *ACTIONS SOCIALES*, the budget currently only notes “*projet à définir*,” and no amount is specified. However, we are all pulling together here, and a project will certainly emerge.

In conclusion, I am happy to echo the Mayor’s words, in which he called for working together in mutual respect. As the opposition, we too have made our contribution to constructive cooperation in the interest of good coexistence in Bertrange. Critical thinking does not exclude this — on the contrary. It is our task to challenge and encourage the majority. To paraphrase Goethe’s *Faust*: the Lord adds the jester to humankind so that he may continually challenge them and foster their development.