

Position of the City of Bloomington Environmental Commission on Economic Growth in the United States

(Adapted from the Position of the United States Society for Ecological Economics on Economic Growth in the United States and adopted on May 22, 2008 in a 4-2-0 vote following two years of discussion.)

Whereas:

- 1) Economic growth, as understood by most professional economists, policy officials and private citizens, is an increase in the production and consumption of goods and services, and;
- 2) Economic growth occurs when there is an increase in the multiplied product of population and per capita consumption, and;
- 3) Economic growth has long been a primary policy goal of U.S. society and government because of the belief that it leads to an enhanced quality of life, and;
- 4) Economic growth is usually measured by increasing gross domestic product (GDP), although this is an incomplete indicator of quality of life that excludes the equity of income distribution, other social factors such as physical health and level of crime, and ecological health, and;
- 5) The U.S. economy grows as an integrated whole consisting of agricultural, extractive, manufacturing, and services sectors (and the supporting infrastructure) that requires physical inputs of non-renewable resources, land and water, and that produces wastes, and;
- 6) Economic growth occurs in a finite and depletable biophysical context, and;
- 7) Continuing non-renewable resource-intensive economic growth is having unintended damaging consequences for ecosystems and human societies...

Therefore, the Bloomington Environmental Commission takes the position that based on the above evidence:

- 1) There is a fundamental conflict between economic growth and ecosystem health (in such areas as biodiversity conservation, clean air and water, and atmospheric stability) and the ecosystem services deriving from healthy ecosystems that underpin the human economy (for example, regeneration of renewable resources, decomposition and recycling of wastes, pollination of crops and other vegetation, and climate regulation), and;
- 2) Although technological progress and unregulated markets have had many positive effects they cannot be depended upon to fully reconcile the conflict between economic growth and the long-term ecological and social welfare of the U.S. and the world, and;
- 3) A sustainable economy (that is, an economy with a relatively stable, mildly fluctuating product of population and per capita consumption) is a viable alternative to a growing economy and has become a more appropriate goal for the U.S. and other large, wealthy economies, and;
- 4) A long-run sustainable economy requires its establishment at a size small enough to avoid the breaching of ecological and economic capacity (especially during supply shocks such as droughts and energy shortages) to promote the efficient use of energy, materials and water, and enable an accelerated shift toward the use of renewable energy sources, and;
- 5) A sustainable economy supports economic development, an increase in human welfare through strategic changes in the relative prominence of economic sectors and techniques (e.g. renewable vs. non-renewable energy) that maintains the human economy within the regenerative and assimilative capacity of the larger earth system, and;
- 6) While establishing a sustainable economy, it would be advisable for the U.S. to assist other nations in moving from the goal of economic growth to the goal of a sustainable economy, beginning with those nations currently enjoying adequate per capita consumption, and;
- 7) For many nations with widespread poverty, increasing per capita consumption through economic growth and often via more equitable distributions of wealth remains an appropriate goal.