University and city differ on billboard regulations

By Tim Powell

Imagine sitting in a cancer ward, looking out the window every day at a Marlboro billboard.

"We heard complaints from hospital officials," said Tim Lantzy, General Manager of Donrey Outdoor Advertising. Patients, especially those recovering from lung cancer, couldn't avoid the tobacco ad from their windows, and complained to hospital personnel, Lantzy said.

Donrey recently removed the board, which had been across from Riverside Hospital for 17 years, said Brad Jones, head official in charge of signs for the city's Development Department.

Jones said the Donrey board was "poor taste," but in other parts of the city the ad probably would not have received any complaints.

For instance, on-campus advertising policies concerning alcohol and tobacco differ from off-campus regulations.

Because the university is state owned, rules and policies regarding outdoor advertising are more strict, and no new billboards are permitted on campus.

"We try not to allow any alcohol or tobacco advertising," said Okey Tolley, Facilities Information Specialist with the university.

The City of Columbus designates campus as University College and doesn't regulate it, but areas outside of campus are regulated by the city. There are four such zones that border University College.

"I can't stand them," said George Irvin, a senior Theatre major living at the corner of 13th Avenue and High Street.

Irvin lives in one of the zones east of High Street.

"It's bad enough this area is run down, but to also clutter it with billboards? I think the same rule should apply to areas just off campus as they do on campus."

Students familiar with campus boundaries know, however, that there are indeed boards present on the southeast grounds at the corner of Lane Avenue and Kenny Road.

Tolley said Ohio State has tried unsuccessfully to eliminate the boards on Kenny Road and Lane Avenue. However, the boards at the location were erected before it became university property, and once they are put in place, the boards are permitted by state law to remain.

According to Tolley, a graphic placed at the Kenny Road and Lane Avenue location a few years ago "caused quite a stir."

The board, which displayed a waist shot of a male's torso in tight jeans, was headlined "Sticky Fingers" from the Rolling Stones hit, and was promoting the radio station, WLVR-FM.

Had the "Sticky Fingers" board been placed east of High Street, "no one would have had a problem," Jones said.

Donrey, the largest outdoor advertising company in Columbus, placed some of the "Sticky Fingers" boards and received many complaints from residents living near the Kenny Road and Lane Avenue sights.

Because of the public pressure, Donrey removed the graphic. "I know of a number of instances where Donrey has responded to public concerns," Jones said.

Jones admitted the graphic was in poor taste, but said in other instances, residents complain simply because they despise the outdoor medium.

"Some believe billboards should not exist at all," Jones said. Urban sprawl helps those people by displacing the boards, Jones said.