

Dog Warden Packing Heat

Colton Complaint Triggers Board To Review Issue

By LARRY ROBINSON

COLTON - Town officials have established a special subcommittee to help sort out whether it's appropriate for the municipality's dog control officer to continue carrying a pistol while giving out tickets and warnings to residents in the community.

The board agreed to look into the issue of whether guns can be carried by town employees after Morgan Road resident Jon Sabin attended a recent town council meeting and suggested Colton Dog Control Officer Charles Fish Jr., should not be allowed to strap on his

"He likes to pull his jacket back so you know the gun is there. Like don't do anything stupid. Look what I've got,"

- Jen Niles

private sidearm during official town business.

Sabin has also threatened to sue the township if they don't force Fish to resign.

Sabin and Fish have had run-ins in the past, according to community members, and the latest flare-up began after Fish reportedly told residents of the Morgan Road that two beagles belonging to

Jen Niles were making too much noise.

Sabin says Fish has shown up on more than one occasion to complain about the dogs and that each time the dog officer arrived he was wearing a .357 magnum handgun.

Town Supervisor Bill Swafford acknowledged Fish does have a pistol permit and is known to carry a sidearm. He

also said he personally does not have a problem with the dog officer strapping on his sidearm while conducting officials business.

"I'd be lying if I said he didn't have a gun," explained Swafford. "He has a permit to carry the gun. It's for his self protection (against dogs). I think he's been doing his job."

Fish did not return a reporter's phone call yesterday to talk about the controversy.

Colton Town Councilman Joe Zelinski is one of two board members tapped to

serve on a special committee that will look at whether Fish should be asked to put his gun away while on town business. Also serving on the committee is Councilwoman Grace Hawley.

Zelinski said he and Hawley will meet in the next couple of days, but suggested he is uneasy about the prospect of any town employees carrying weapons while on official duty.

"I have a license to carry myself," according to Zelinski. "But I would never carry my gun on any official town business."

Zelinski said he also

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believes that a town handbook spelling out the do's and don'ts of working for the town government in Colton already prohibits town employees from carrying firearms while on duty or in town vehicles.

"If it is in fact in the handbook then it really becomes a moot point," he said.

Niles said last night that she has often felt uneasy when the town dog warden

has shown up at her property to complain about her pure bred beagles barking. She says the trained search and rescue dogs are well behaved for the most part but admits they sometimes do like to bark.

"They're dogs," she said.

She also alleges that on more than one occasion the Colton town dog control officer has deliberately eased back the front of his jacket to show the fact that he has a holstered weapon on his per-

son.

"He likes to pull his jacket back so you know the gun is there," according to Niles. "Like don't do anything stupid. Look what I've got."

Sabin, who lives with Niles and also lives just a few homes away from Fish on the Morgan Road, admits problems with the dog warden go back more than a decade.

"This individual thinks he's Wyatt Earp and was sent here to clean up Dodge City," Sabin said.