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2013-01-24 / Princeton News

Princeton joins PCB lawsuit

BY PHYLLIS BOOTH

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Princeton has joined other Massachusetts school districts in a class action lawsuit involving PCBs in school buildings.

Princeton's involvement in the suit concerns the PCBs at Thomas Prince School.

At their Jan. 14 meeting, selectmen voted to authorize Town Administrator John Lebeaux to engage the New York law firm of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his partner, Kevin Madonna, on a

contingency basis in the matter.

So far Princeton's total costs for mitigation of the PCBs, including the cost to transport students to Glenwood School in Rutland for a year during that time, is \$705,000, said Lebeaux. "There will also be a cost for future testing, and there could potentially be a settlement," he said.

Lexington filed a class action lawsuit in federal court seeking damages on behalf of itself and other school districts throughout Massachusetts that are affected by potentially harmful levels of chemicals known as PCBs. The lawsuit is against Pharmacia Corporation, Solutia Inc. and Monsanto Company, the producers of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

Lexington is facing PCB issues in more than one school and has to demolish a building as a result, Lebeaux said. They are facing as much as \$2 million in expenses for the work, he said.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, PCBs can potentially cause cancer if they build up in the body. PCBs, once commonly used in construction materials such as caulking, were banned in 1976.

The suit claims that Monsanto knew or should have known the public health and environmental dangers posed by the use of the chemicals in the construction of schools from the 1950s through the 1970s and failed to provide adequate warnings.

The town doesn't have to come up with funds to pay for the attorneys, but the firm would take one-third of any award, Lebeaux said. "Monsanto has filed for a dismissal. It could take one to three years," he added. If certified, Princeton will be included, Lebeaux said.

"We see no downside for the town to get involved on a contingency basis," Lebeaux said.

In other business, Lebeaux reported that the Green Repair project at the school is done, including the punch list. The skylight needs to be put in and that will be done in April, he said. The reports on the work will be sent to the Environmental Protection Agency and then the town will start the process for permanent financing, he added.

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