

Out-of-state gay marriages may end

■ Provincetown will discuss its options after the attorney general ordered a halt to nonresident licenses.

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PROVINCETOWN — Gay couples who wish to marry but not live in Massachusetts have found refuge in Provincetown for a week, but that could end today.

Town officials today are expected to discuss an order by the governor and attorney general to stop issuing marriage licenses to nonresident same-sex

couples. A special counsel hired to advise the town on same-sex marriage issues will outline the options.

Provincetown is among four Bay State communities to defy Gov. Mitt Romney's edict not to issue marriage licenses to nonresident gay couples who do not plan to move to Massachusetts.

On Friday, state Attorney General Thomas Reilly told city and town officials to stop issuing licenses to out-of-state couples or face criminal action, after reviewing 10 applications flagged by Romney as questionable.

Provincetown officials did not take immediate action and have allowed the town clerk to continue issuing licenses to

nonresident same-sex couples.

Since May 17, when gay marriage became legal in Massachusetts, at least 42 out-of-state couples have filed their intentions to marry with the Provincetown town clerk's office, nine of which informed town officials they had no plans to move to Massachusetts, according to the town's Web site.

Selectmen are scheduled to meet today with Gretchen Van Ness, a Boston attorney who specializes in civil rights and gay and lesbian issues. Town officials announced the hiring of Van Ness May 17.

Cheryl Andrews, chairwoman of the selectmen, said yesterday the board's policy on

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issuing licenses to out-of-staters "has not changed. We have not met as a board since May 17. We have not met with legal counsel since May 17."

Van Ness said she could not comment on what might be discussed in the meeting. But she said she was encouraged by the letter sent Friday by Reilly to officials of the four "defiant"

municipalities — Provincetown, Somerville, Springfield and Worcester — each of which has continued to marry out-of-state couples.

The letter, among other things, invited the towns to offer their own interpretations of the 1913 law that Romney and Reilly have interpreted as prohibiting nonresident couples

from marrying in the Bay State since those unions would not be legal in their home states.

How to respond to Reilly's letter, which was faxed Friday to Provincetown Town Hall, is among the issues likely to be discussed in today's meeting, Van Ness said. "We're now in the process of having to implement the (Goodrich) decision with some of those questions unanswered," she said of the state Supreme Judicial Court ruling that legalized gay marriage in Massachusetts.

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