

**SURVEY**  
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Tomahawk that are offering excellent services at no cost to the taxpayers. Pine Crest could be run in the same manner," Charlie Jarvis said.

Others questioned why selling Pine Crest to a private entity was automatically perceived that it would result in poorer quality care for residents.

"I totally support selling Pine Crest to a private company," one woman said. "Being a long-term healthcare worker, I know privately owned does not at all translate to poor care. Nursing homes are regulated and inspected. Staffing is an issue everywhere and a facility is only as good as the employees caring for the residents."

**Increased taxes supported with a caveat**

Even some respondents who said they would support a tax increase said changes need to be made.

"The way I understand it, is that Pine Crest is operating way over their budget," a Merrill woman said. "If we are able to increase the budget a little, (with minor tax increases), that is fine with me. If it is going to require hundreds of dollars of increases in taxes, then I do not support that and feel it maybe should be sold."

"(I) have 25+ years working as a CFO at three different Wisconsin hospitals and advanced each one from 6-digit annual losses to 7-digit annual profits," Thomas J. Semling said. "The primary cause was mismanagement and pocket lining."

"I would support Lincoln County retaining ownership of Pine Crest pending an assessment by an experienced consultant in geriatric services/long-term care specialist who could provide a comprehensive assessment of the quality of the existing services, given the declines that have occurred since the onset of North Central Health Care system assuming the management of the facility," Mary Jo Rajek said. "An experienced consultant can make recommendations as to how to maximize the potential for long-term

care services and revenue-producing programs to offset the expected costs of operations when residents age in place and their care is covered through Medicaid (which has never covered the costs of actual care needs). I have worked in rehabilitation services for over 44 years to include long term care, inpatient rehab services, outpatient rehab services, specialty outpatient clinics for traumatic brain injury, MS, home health, and adult day care. Both of my parents have been residents at Pine Crest ... What I have observed since my return to Pine Crest has been nothing short of an administrative debacle since the management takeover by NCHC. Cost cutting measures have directly impacted the quality of care the residents receive with loss of experienced clinicians, chronically short-staffed units, (and) temp staff who do not have the familiarity with the residents (and) their medical complexities and longer-term emotional needs. While the current care may be adequate, it is not remotely the quality it was when my parents were there several years ago."

"There has got to be a way to make this place profitable once again," a rural Merrill woman said. "Adding an assisted-living portion would be great, possibly connected daycare options. Try looking for these things in this area. The waiting lists are long and sometimes there are no other options. We need to care for our aging population. ... It's time to brainstorm on how to improve the current situation, not sell it off to a private party."

**Citizens for keeping Pine Crest county-owned**

"The community would like to keep Pine Crest community owned because the community is a family, and family care for their own," Carey Volgman said.

"This facility is vital to the Lincoln County residents," Linda Huss said. "We live in an area where many come to retire and enjoy the quiet life. Many have grown up here and returned after retirement to be back with family."

These people need an affordable place to place aging parents nearby and not a couple hours away. If you interview the younger residents of Lincoln County, you will find that they are smart enough to know that a couple hundred dollars a year is a great investment for quality of life for the senior citizens of this county. It saddens me that the County Board has placed the value of a dollar over the value of caring for the aging and victims of stroke, major heart attacks, etc."

"Keeping Pine Crest a County-owned care facility would be beneficial to those who reside in Lincoln County because Pine Crest accepts more patients who are on a fixed or a lower income," Taylor Polak said. "Instead of funds being solely sourced from property taxes, an increase of County sales tax would spread the need for funds across anyone who shops in Lincoln County. A sales tax increase of 0.5% would be a great start. This is an increase of 50 cents per every \$100.00 spent. This would solve the issues of those who only own property supporting the cost of Pine Crest. With a County-wide increase of sales tax, sufficient funds would be allotted to keep Pine Crest County owned. Keeping a County-owned nursing home in Lincoln County will allow fixed- or lower-income residents a safe place when they are in need of a nursing home."

"Property taxes here are very low compared to other places we've lived,

both in and out of state-as well as other locations in Wisconsin," Sarah Litzer said. "I have no children, but have never begrudged the amount of property taxes we pay in order to fund schools. I consider it an investment to make my community more livable and the same is true for property taxes we pay that fund the many services our community offers, even if we don't avail ourselves of those services. No taxes equals no services, a foolish choice for people living together in our present-day society. We are retired and live on a 'fixed' income, but we continue to choose to live here because of the services available and the relatively low cost of living. People who have never lived anywhere else seem to lack this perspective."

"A recommendation I have for the County Board," Polak said, "is they should take a look at how other county-owned facilities are run and funded. How do they stay open and afloat? Why are they receiving more funds than Lincoln County? What can Lincoln County do to earn more government funding?"

One woman summarized a common thread running throughout the responses.

"People in this County paid for years for this nursing home," she said. "For many, it was all of their working life so far. Now it could be taken away from them, and that is not fair."

**Referendum**

The one thing both sides of this issue seem to totally

agree on is this: "I think the matter should be addressed through a referendum. I am disappointed in the County Board's indifference to resident concerns," Brian Riese said.

The County Board's refusal to, thus far, put the matter to a referendum, has those with opinions on both sides of the issue frustrated and upset.

"Why does the County Board refuse to put this matter up for a referendum?" one respondent asked.

"Unfortunately, in the modern political climate, elected politicians often forget their mission is to govern the will of the people and not their own misguided political allegiances," Bruce Sunde said. "Denying the opportunity for citizen referendum is the epitome of political arrogance and voter marginalization. The current political notion of 'we know better than the people who sent us here' certainly can be rectified at the ballot box."

"In my opinion, the County Board made a mistake by not allowing the people of this County to vote on an issue that is very personal," Tyler Frederick said. "If the Board just allowed it to go to a vote by the people, then either the people would vote yes to increase in property taxes or vote no to not increase taxes. The yes vote gives the County money to continue

the ownership of Pine Crest and no vote means they can now look at other options."

"I believe it is irresponsible of our elected officials to make such an important decision for the residents of Lincoln County without a referendum informing them of how their electorate feels about this issue," a Merrill man said. "No one wants their taxes to go up, but there is an obligation of the citizens to take care of each other. I am not sure a private entity has the same understanding."

"(I'm) disappointed the elected officials have not listened to people in the community. They have lost all trust for me," a Merrill woman said.

Many others made similar comments.

"I understand the complexity of this issue, and understand this is a tough issue. But listen to those who have elected you."

"Listen to your constituents," Gwen Cotter said.

"If Pine Crest is sold, there will be no turning back," she said. "Time to put the brakes on and rethink this whole decision with the public's input. Thank you for providing this survey."

**Additional coverage available online**

For additional coverage of the Pine Crest survey, visit [www.tomahawkleader.com](http://www.tomahawkleader.com) and [www.merrillfotonews.com](http://www.merrillfotonews.com).

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