

# LAND SWAP

■ Economics, common sense and neighborliness help eliminate prospect of 25-mile ride to school

BY TERESA DAVIDSON

*Pierce County Herald*

**SOUTH HILL**—Six-year-old Stephen Hauer could've had to travel 25 miles on the school bus each day.

But thanks to a land swap between the Puyallup and Orting school districts, he'll be able to attend an elementary school just blocks from his home this fall.

The Puyallup first-grader and some 50 other students will go to schools close to home because of the agreement by which Orting School District gave up its claim to property in Eagle Ridge, a new neighborhood in the huge Sunrise Development where Hauer and the other students live.

In return, Orting will receive the tax benefit from a parcel of undeveloped commercial land on 122nd Avenue East.

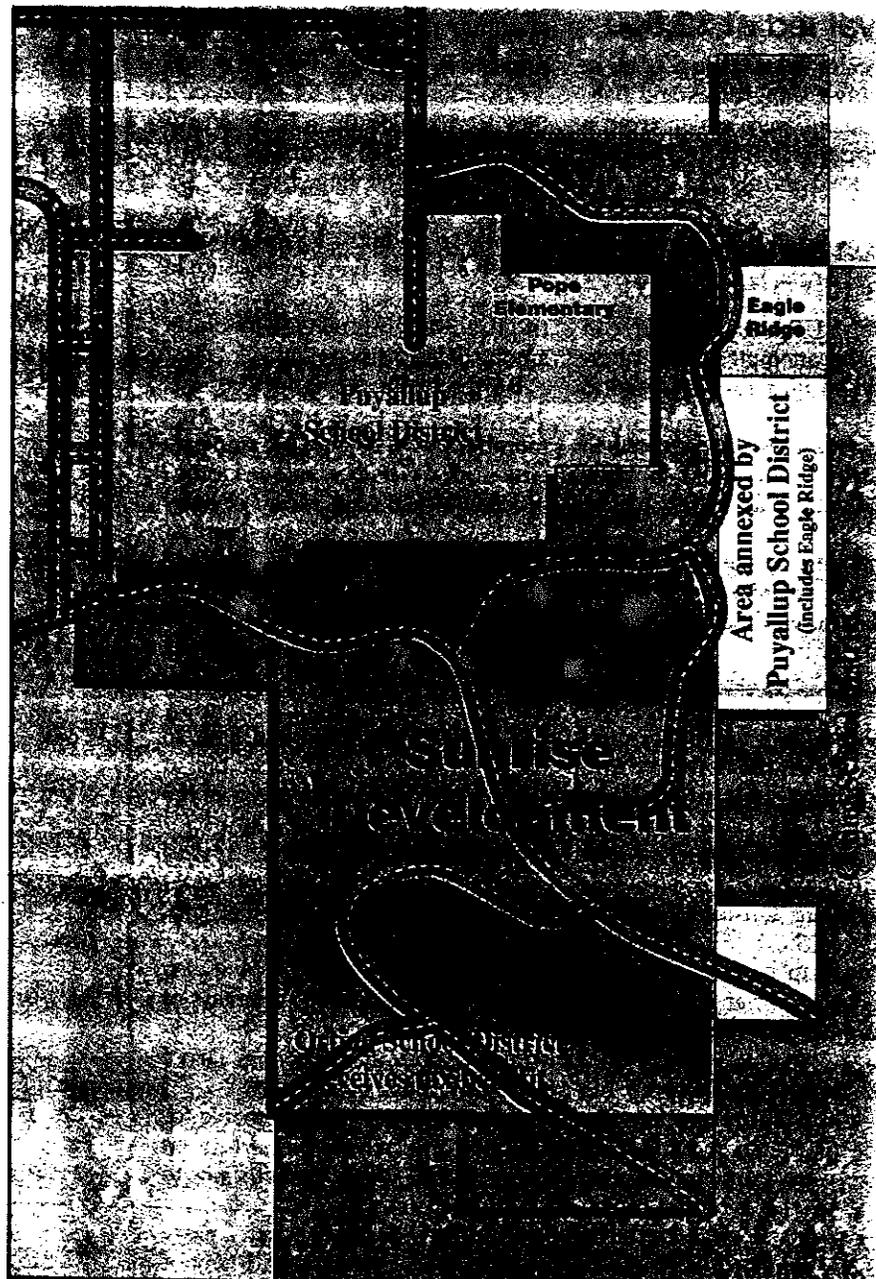
Stephen's mother, Tammra, is among those who are delighted with the deal.

"He'll go to a neighborhood school now," she said of her son. "He'll be joining all the other neighborhood kids."

The deal also leaves Tammra Hauer with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

That's because she was the driving force behind it.

Hauer organized her neighbors to secede from the Orting School District two years ago after moving



Steve Heeb/Pierce County Herald

into the newly-developed subdivision and learning her son would have to ride the school bus almost 13 miles one-way to Orting schools.

Although Eagle Ridge is just a couple of miles east of Orting, no direct road connects the two because Eagle Ridge is across the Puyallup

River from Orting and atop a sheer cliff that makes construction of a direct link impractical.

"My son would have had to go through both Puyallup and Bethel school districts to get to Orting schools," said Hauer.

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## Schools

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Because of the travel, some 35 families who live in a 75-home neighborhood of Sunrise Development petitioned Orting schools to alter the boundary lines so their property would be in the Puyallup School District.

Orting Superintendent Lee Thoren responded by suggesting that the parents appeal to the Puget Sound Educational Service District, which oversees the area's school districts.

"This had to be a situation where it was the residents who were requesting a boundary change," explained Hauer. "It couldn't be the school districts."

Last fall, the educational service district committee suggested the residents, the Sunrise developer and the school districts hammer out a solution rather than relying on a committee to come up with one.

So, the two districts negotiated a swap that the state education board approved in late July.

"All our neighbors are just

thrilled," said Hauer, whose son will attend Pope Elementary School this year.

Orting school officials said they initially had qualms about the proposed land swap.

They were worried that the school district would lose millions in projected tax revenue from the Eagle Ridge development, Thoren explained.

The potential tax benefits from the undeveloped commercial land that could become a business park more than makes up for the lost revenue, he added.

The length of the route that would have been necessary to bring the students from Eagle Ridge to an Orting school and back again was a major factor in the school district's decision to give up the Eagle Ridge residences.

"Now it's extremely convenient for the newcomers to the development to attend school," said Tony Apostle, assistant to Puyallup School District Superintendent Herb Berg.

"It's great," Hauer said of the land swap and its impact on her

son. "He'll be joining in all the extracurricular activities as a full-fledged student."

The students could have attended Puyallup schools even if the land swap hadn't been adopted, but parents would have had to fill out substantial paperwork and their children would have been assigned to whatever schools in the district had room for them.

Last year, for example, Stephen Hauer went to kindergarten at Ridgecrest Elementary, about four miles to the north.

From now on, students in the Eagle Ridge development are slated to attend Pope Elementary School, Stahl Junior High and Rogers High School.

Eventually, a junior high and a high school providing even easier access will be available if the Puyallup School District is able to proceed with building plans in the area.

Construction of a junior high is scheduled for 1996, and the district hopes to begin construction of a new high school the year after that.

# A friendly border dispute

Money is only obstacle to swap between Puyallup and Orting school districts

BY BILLIE JO BOUIC

*Pierce County Herald*

Homeowners in the Eagle Ridge section of the Sunrise development on South Hill don't want to be in the Orting School District.

Orting School District officials doesn't blame them.

Puyallup School District is willing to annex the property.

There's only one hangup—and it has a dollar sign in front of it.

"We're very property poor," said Orting Superintendent Lee Thoren. In fact, in recent years Orting has consistently had the county's lowest ratio of property tax revenue to number of students.

Thoren estimates Eagle Ridge represents about \$8 million in taxable property.

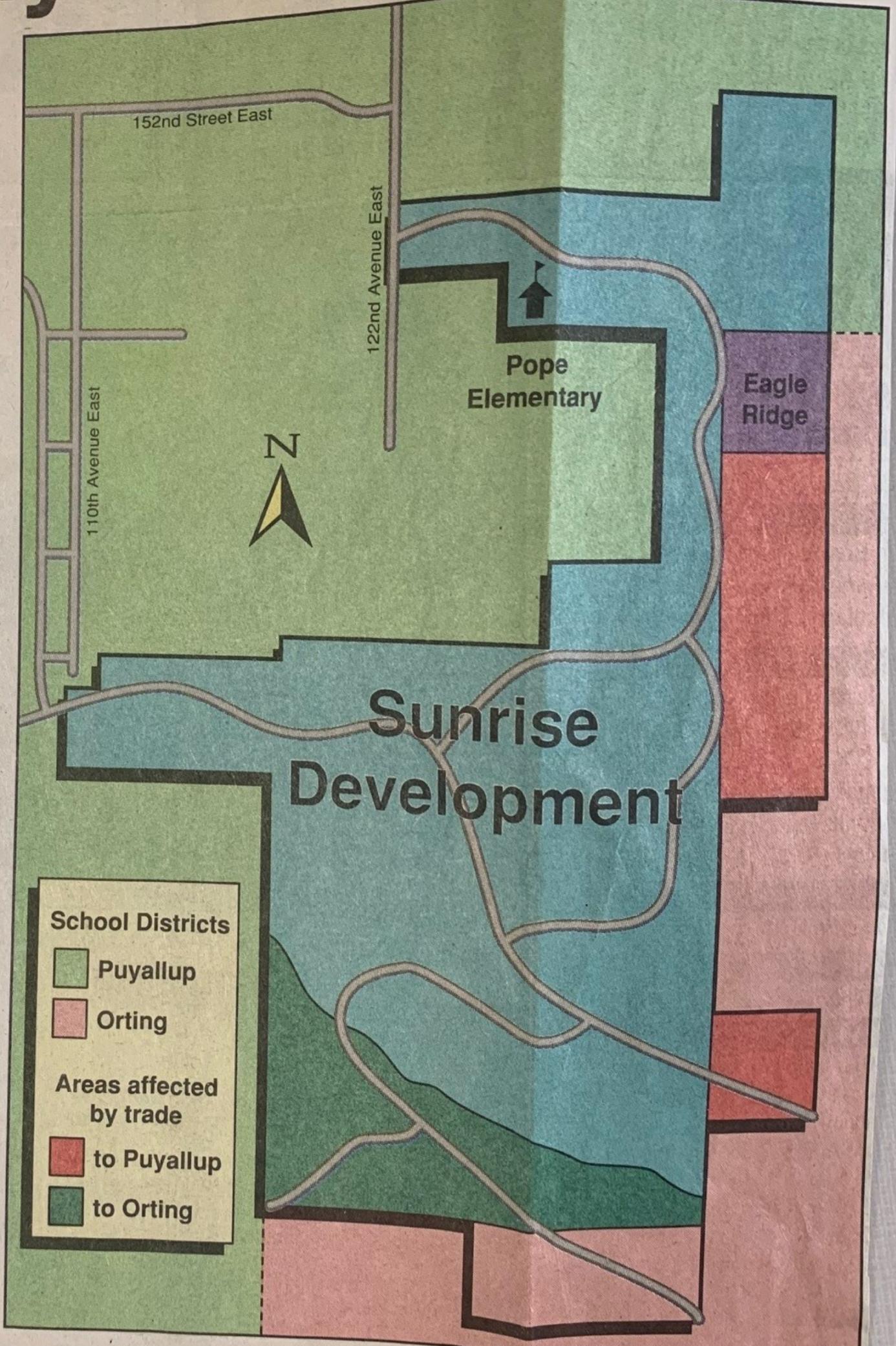
He also estimates that more than 600 homes with a total value of \$90 million-\$100 million will be built on several adjoining sections of Sunrise that also are within the Orting School District's boundaries.

"We can expect similar petitions in the future," Thoren said of the prospects if Orting releases Eagle Ridge without dealing with the rest of the property at the same time.

When school district lines were drawn many years ago, no one anticipated the volume of growth taking place in the Puyallup Valley today.

Yet Thoren believes it wasn't just a lack of foresight that brought about the secession effort. He speculates that those who drew up the district borders never even visited the area.

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Steve Heeb/Pierce County Herald

Growth has forced school districts to reconsider obsolete boundaries.

## Swap

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"The river was probably the only landmark they recognized on the map they were looking at," he says. "They probably thought the area where Sunrise is was down in the valley."

Regardless, the boundaries are now obsolete. On that point, everyone agrees.

The Orting school closest to Eagle Ridge is about 10 miles away, down in the valley, but some residents, in fact, can see Puyallup's Pope Elementary from their windows.

For the sake of what they consider convenience and common sense, Eagle Ridge residents have been working since February to have their neighborhood transferred to Puyallup's district. Nearly 50 people signed a petition that was presented to the regional committee of the Educational Service District.

Last month, the committee suggested that the residents, the developer and the school districts hammer out a solution rather than relying on the committee to come up with one.

Interested parties have met since then—most recently last Wednesday—and have come up with a tentative plan.

The plan calls for an across the board swap. Puyallup would annex Eagle Ridge and the adjoining property east of the border that's earmarked for residential development. In return, Orting would receive an area at the southern end of the Sunrise development—but not too big an area, since Puyallup already has purchased property there for construction of new schools, including a high school, when needed.

The property Orting would receive in the swap has two distinctive advantages: 1. It is earmarked for development as an industrial park, which means it would generate lots of tax revenue. 2. It would not be the site of residential development, which could further dilute the district's revenue-to-student ratio and spawn yet more petitions to switch districts.

Orting has hired a consultant to conduct a feasibility study, which will include the best guess possible on whether such an industrial park would actually attract any business given the current economy.

The Orting School Board will hear a report on that study at a Dec. 2 meeting, when it could even give its blessing then to a shift in boundaries.

Officials of the Orting and Puyallup school district will meet with Eagle Ridge residents and representatives of the Educational Service District on Dec. 7 in hopes of formalizing a plan.

In the interim, about 40 Eagle Ridge students will continue to attend Puyallup schools through temporary releases from the Orting district.

If a land swap cannot be worked out, Eagle Ridge parents could renew such temporary releases on an annual basis, but Eagle Ridge parents aren't enamored of that option. They don't want their children to be outsiders in the Puyallup School District, they explain.

They've got good reason to be concerned, say district officials. Puyallup does its best to accommodate out-of-district students, but such students are last in line for crowded programs or extracurricular activities and first in line to be relocated when schools become overpopulated.

## Thoughts on land swap proposal

Here's what those who will be affected by the possible swap between the Orting and Puyallup school districts have to say about the issue:

Puyallup School District has been very cooperative, very sensitive to the entire tax base problem

**Orting Superintendent Lee Thorn**

We're not out to pirate land, but we also understand the arguments and positions of everyone involved.

**Gary Floyd**

**Puyallup director of special services**

We want to become first-class citizens with Puyallup.

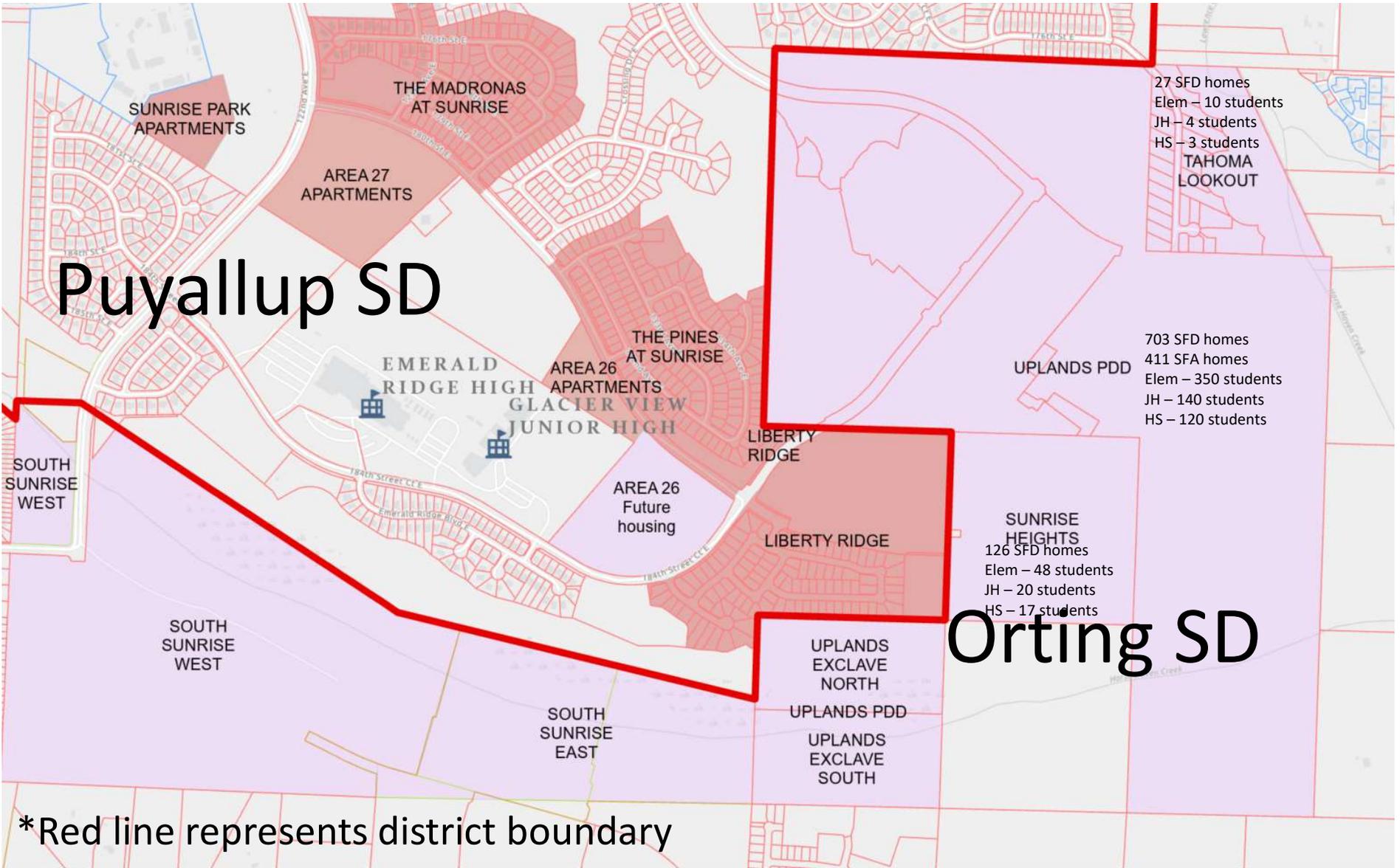
**Resident Tammy Hauer,  
who has a child in kindergarten.**

My interest is how it affects home value—most people want schools that are close.

**Resident Donald Lotz,  
whose two children go to private school**

# Puyallup SD

# Orting SD



\*Red line represents district boundary