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MILTON – Several property owners being assisted by the Central PA Chamber of Commerce received a Christmas present from the state Department of Community & Economic Development.

KOEZ (Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zone) benefits were granted to properties across upper Northumberland County, including ones owned by Central PA Chamber members. The letter was dated Dec. 24, 2018.

The news of Governor Tom Wolf's approval brought both excitement and a sigh of relief for a process that started back in early spring.

"It was a long shot and a nearly 8-month endeavor," said Chamber President & CEO Tea Jay Aikey, who worked with local taxing bodies, property owners and other organizations to prepare the applications. "It was intense at times, and it was the first time in our organization's history that we applied for KOZ designation outside of properties owned by MAIDA (Milton Area Industrial Development Association), the Chamber's economic development arm."

The designation means that the included properties will not be charged property taxes for a 10-year period, starting on Jan. 1, 2019 and ending Dec. 31, 2028.

The savings from property taxes will spur economic growth throughout the area. There are construction plans already in the works for some of the 10 parcels and nearly 200 acres in the Milton Area alone. These properties will also be more desirable in the eyes of potential buyers.

"It was a great learning experience," Aikey said. "It cultivated many new relationships with local officials, governing organizations and it also strengthened others.

"No matter the outcome, the project was not to be determined a loss in my mind."

"To be the preferred Resource Center for our members supporting their economic and business development."