In 2016, after two years of meetings and discussions, Pottstown Council and the Pottstown School Board agreed on the borough’s first LERTA ordinance.

LERTA — which stands for Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance — was touted as a way to encourage economic development by giving property owners a temporary tax break if they improve the value of their properties.

Commercial and industrial properties anywhere in Pottstown qualify, as well as residences on the upper floors of commercial properties in Pottstown’s downtown business district.

Participating property owners still pay full taxes on existing buildings, but taxes are phased in over seven years for improvements, additions, and new construction.

Three years after LERTA was passed, involving lots of hype and hand-wringing, just one property owner has applied for LERTA.

Daniel Helwig, a real estate professional, was accepted into LERTA last year and enjoys reduced taxes for improvements he has made to his property in the Airport Business Campus, as shown in the chart at right.

As a real estate agent, Helwig says Pottstown’s biggest handicap is its high taxes. “That means as a property owner I’m going to look for every tax break I can find.”

Helwig learned about LERTA when he sought permits for property improvements at 383 Circle of Progress in the Airport Business Campus.

He said everyone in borough government was most helpful in the application process.

Still, after three years, you might think there would be more interest.

Pottstown’s economic development director, Peggy Lee-Clark, said she expects more LERTA applications soon.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

CUSTOM CABINETS are made in the LERTA-building by craftsman Ethan Horwitz.

FIRST LERTA PROJECT — A light industrial building at 383 Circle of Progress, owned by Daniel Helwig, is the first project to receive a real estate tax discount through Pottstown’s LERTA ordinance, which was approved by the borough and school district in 2016.