

---

**TAG INFRASTRUCTURE TALKS PODCAST**  
**INTRODUCING TAG INFRASTRUCTURE WITH BOARD CHAIR SARAH ELLIS**  
**S01, EP01**

Alan Poole:

Welcome to the TAG Infrastructure Talk Podcast. My name is Alan Poole. I'm a board member of the Technology Association of Georgia's Infrastructure Society. I'm also the host of this podcast. Today, I have with me, for our very first episode, board member and our society chair, Sarah Ellis. Sarah has over 20 years of experience in the architecture engineering and construction industry. She's a true entrepreneur, a successful one. She's the founder and CEO of several companies, including AEC works. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Ellis:

Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Alan Poole:

Yeah. Me too. I'm so excited this is our launch episode.

Sarah Ellis:

I know.

Alan Poole:

Great. So to start, can you tell me about your journey and how that led you here to chair the Infrastructure Society?

Sarah Ellis:

Absolutely. So I started my career at the second largest lighting manufacturer in the world, Cooper Lighting. They're headquartered in Peachtree City. Fun fact, we have the two largest lighting manufacturers in the world right here in Georgia, which is very cool. When I left, I did tech support for them and designed lighting and lighting control systems all over the world for their rep for eight years. I always wanted to have my own business. I started a business, retired from that in 2019, consulted for a couple of years to help other small businesses do in their business what I had done in mine and now I'm back at it with AEC works. We're a specialty custom contractor and we specialize in motorization and daylight harvesting and smart buildings.

Alan Poole:

What made TAG make sense for you in your career?

Sarah Ellis:

Absolutely. Well, 2020, like for a lot of people, was a year of transition for me and it was the same for TAG. And TAG, the chair at the time needed help and called and said, "Hey, will you be the vice chair of the TAG Infrastructure Society?" And I said, "I'm absolutely happy to serve and give back to this industry that has given so much to me over the years." And here we are today.

Alan Poole:

So I know you do a lot of work for data centers. Was that before TAG or did TAG make that happen more?

Sarah Ellis:

Yes. During my time consulting, I consulted for a structural engineer that designed a lot of hyperscale data centers. And so through that, I experience, I was able to connect with a lot of people in the data center space. And that's how I met our past chair and was then brought in. It's interesting because there's not a lot of window treatments in data centers. So in the data center space, we have a different suite of services that we offer like lighting, and furnishings, and wire cages, and things like that. But my main reason for being involved really wasn't to get anything out of it, but to give to ... give back to this industry.

Alan Poole:

Right now, what is your vision for the purpose of the Infrastructure Society for your term?

Sarah Ellis:

So my hope for this year is that as a society that we can recruit and educate the broader population about what is so great about our industry and how could they get involved. And so they can start to see themselves because there's a massive demand and need for workers in this space. And so we need to be able to recruit those people out of school that may not even know that there is an opportunity to work in infrastructure, and what does that look like, and how can that be something that's a prestigious career? For so long, I think we thought the American dream was to work really hard, and save enough money, and go to college. All you ever wanted was for your kids to go to college. Well, now they're graduating with six figures in debt and it's taking them a really long time to pay that off.

So hopefully through our involvement with TAG, we can show them another path that allows them to build something that they're really proud of and not have an enormous amount of debt college debt to go with it. So that's my hope on that side of it. And then a lot of our society members and the people that attend our events, they're technologists. And so it's a space where they can come and talk to other people that actually know what they're talking about and what they do. And they can get better, and brainstorm, and collaborate and find ways to learn from each other. This industry is changing so fast and every day it's different. And so we need that community where we can come together and support each other and help each other.

Alan Poole:

There's so many different segments of the infrastructure industry and they're all connected, but it's really easy to get pigeonholed in your own space. For me, I work on fiber network development. And I am sometimes surprised I don't know more about data centers. So this has been a great opportunity to network with and build relationships with data center professionals and just learn absolutely more about it.

Sarah Ellis:

Alan, why don't you introduce yourself a little bit?

Alan Poole:

Oh, sure. Yeah. Thank you. So how did I get here? Well, I was going through the motions at Georgia tech.

Sarah Ellis:

Like most college students.

Alan Poole:

Yeah. And then I was really interested in psychology, but I didn't want to have to move all over the country to do academia. So I found out that I ... at least I thought that practicing law would be really fun. So I studied hard, did well in law school and then got a job at this law firm, Troutman Pepper. Okay. Well, so what are you actually going to do?

Sarah Ellis:

Yeah.

Alan Poole:

And I found what I think is one of the most, if not the most interesting practice groups in the firm, it's focused on fiber optic network development. So while many attorneys would say I'm a litigator or I'm a deal maker, I focus on a market segment. I do whatever I can to solve the hardest problems that I can find. So I've been honing my expertise in certain areas that are related to that, that are important to that market for the last almost nine years. And now I'm looking for the next big challenge, which is learning more, finding a really interesting place to serve, as you said.

I've tried many things over the years, but I always thought that the technology association of Georgia, as far as opportunities that are relevant to your market, seem like the absolute best choice. And I was just so excited when I had the chance not to serve on the board, but to tackle the challenge of starting a podcast. That was really fortuitous because we have people that try and help us figure out how to build business. And everybody was saying, "The legal field is finally catching up to podcast. You should think about it." When I heard that, I was like, "Well, I'd like to try and make that happen."

Podcasts are a really great way to, for me to learn, but for also for others to learn as well. We hope we'll have many listeners. I like the challenge of trying to line up speakers and not just have single episodes, but try and tell a greater story. We're also really fortunate to have great facilities here at the law firm that make it really easy. We always say lawyers amongst themselves, the past was spending five to seven articles ... hours writing an article. Why do that when you can spend two hours putting out way cooler content in the form of a podcast?

Sarah Ellis:

Right. I love that. And I appreciate so much your leadership with it. And it is interesting how it's evolving. Our hope is that it improves the lives of our listeners, but it's also entertaining. You're doing a great job. So I appreciate your service.

Alan Poole:

Well, thanks very much. So the podcast is going to be probably the newest and a really big part of how we meet our goal to increase education and awareness of infrastructure in the region. But the other two big things that we do are events and some legislative efforts. So why don't we briefly go over the events that we have?

Sarah Ellis:

Absolutely. So how we have our outreach typically with the community is through in-person events. And it was funny because last year we didn't realize we were really the only one doing in-person events. But it was a lot of fun. And we got people out of their yoga pants and pajama pants and into real clothes. And so this year we have three more events for the rest of the year. We have a large data center summit that's going to be at Porsche's headquarters. It'll be a huge event, lots of fun. If you get tired of listening to the speakers, there'll be some beautiful cars you can look at. And then we'll have a clay shoot. And we do always try to do something really fun for the community. It's a way for us to come together, shoot some sporting clays, have some competition going, friendly competition of course, win some fun prizes. And then we'll do a Veterans Day event which will actually be on Veterans Day. And it's our way of honoring the veterans that have given so much for the safety and security of our country and highlight how they've taken those lessons that they've learned and how they've applied into technology. And that's another huge passion of mine.

We ask these young kids when they go into the military to give it all. And then how do we help and support them when that time is done and give them a pathway into learning a new trade and taking the good things about what they learned in the military and applying those to the private sector? And so this is our way of honoring them and learning from them as well.

Alan Poole:

That's very exciting. I know I'll be helping out with those.

Sarah Ellis:

I'm sure you will.

Alan Poole:

I can't wait to see the content though. The content is king. As a podcaster, that's on all of our minds.

Sarah Ellis:

Absolutely. Yeah. We have some incredible speakers lined up for both of the events, the Data Center Summit and for the Veterans Day event. And they are so incredibly just vulnerable and open about what's worked and what hasn't worked. I think so many times you go out there looking for that content and you just get a lot of fluff. I don't know anything more now than I did two hours ago. How do I get those two hours of my life back? So we intentionally spend a lot of time and effort on the front end to make sure that if you've entrusted us with this small part of your life, that it is that time that is time well spent.

Alan Poole:

Yeah. Exciting stuff. So the last thing is the legislative work that TAG does.

Sarah Ellis:

Yeah. Being a lawyer, you could probably speak a lot better to that than me.

Alan Poole:

So I'm happy to talk about this because it illustrates what the society can do to forward infrastructure and have that turn into the results that matter to everyday people. So back in 2018, the society helped with House Bill 696 that allowed for tax exemptions for data center development. And I just think, what great timing? And we all saw that it worked. Atlanta, Georgia, the Metro Area. Not just Atlanta, but Douglasville comes to mind-

Sarah Ellis:

[inaudible 00:11:16] circle.

Alan Poole:

Right. The Northeast part of the Metro area. It's a new data center hub. Virginia is considered the data center hub nearby, but other locations are needed for various reasons, including route and data diversity, but also being close to where the technology is processing information.

Fast forward to now, we're working on draft House Bill 1187 and 1291. Those will extend existing tax incentives for investment and end-user technology, which again, for that to succeed, for the tech hub of Atlanta to work, we need this infrastructure. I'd be really excited to talk to Brandon Peccorolo from DataBank about ATL1, which is a super computer supporting data center in Midtown in the CODA building. And it's not just the data center, it helps heat the building at times because it just gives off so much heat. This is exciting stuff.

Sarah Ellis:

It is.

Alan Poole:

It was so funny to be an infrastructure nerd in 2013.

Sarah Ellis:

Right. Nobody even knew what it was.

Alan Poole:

People were like, "What are you talking about?" And I started with pole attachments. Literally like the law of attaching wires to poles.

Sarah Ellis:

Wow.

Alan Poole:

People were like, "That is [inaudible 00:12:40]."

Sarah Ellis:

There's a whole business for that. Wow.

Alan Poole:

Yep. And then things started happening. Google Fiber made that really exciting by putting it in the news. So it was 1% more interesting at parts that I worked on pole attachments. Now I do

much more than that, but the Infrastructure Bill right now is ... You can't get it out of the news and it's obviously huge for our industry. So I'm hopeful to cover not just that bill, and how it works, and what opportunities people get from it, but what that's ... how that's going to disrupt certain industries, how that's going to ... where we hope that goes in the future, and whether that's the best model. It's an exciting time to be doing this podcast.

Sarah Ellis:

It really is. It's an exciting time to be in this industry and just be in the middle of it. Again, learning from each other and figuring out, okay, how do we navigate this? And it's changing every day. And so having that network and those relationships that we can all help each other learn because what was true yesterday may be untrue tomorrow.

Alan Poole:

Exactly. So to start wrapping up this great introductory episode, let me ask you a couple of sort of open-ended questions. What do you view as your greatest challenge during this Infrastructure Society term?

Sarah Ellis:

Sure. I think our biggest challenge is to make sure that we fully understand what people need in this current season of their life. Do they need technical training? Do they need help reconnecting on those relationships that may have gone stale over the last couple of years? Do they just want to get out of their house and get dressed up and go somewhere? So we just want to make sure that we're kind of capturing all of that. And this being our very first episode, we want that feedback. We want people to leave comments and say, "Okay. Sarah, you talked too much. We really want to hear more of this. So we want to hear more about those bills. How do we take advantage of those for our business? Where's the opportunity in the industry? What could be better?" We want that feedback because we're not mind readers. But we have a heart of service and we want to add value. You've invested a tremendous amount of time and effort in making this a success. And so we just need that feedback in these first few episodes about what we can do to make it better and we will.

Alan Poole:

Right. What do you most hope to accomplish in this next coming year?

Sarah Ellis:

Yeah. My hope is that at the end of this year, we have improved the lives of the people on our board, in our societies, and then anyone that we've reached through these podcasts. That we would just be that glimmer of hope that we would give up. We would answer that question that's just been keeping them awake at night, that we would just find a way to make this world a little bit better than we found it.

Alan Poole:

That means a lot to me because I've found and I think a lot of people have found ... And you were getting at this. We're trying to dig ourselves out of a period in our lives where we just couldn't get together.

Sarah Ellis:

No.

Alan Poole:

And we thought we could replace it-

Sarah Ellis:

Kind of lost. How?

Alan Poole:

Yeah.

Sarah Ellis:

It's like, "I used to be way better at this than I am now. How do I do small talk again?"

Alan Poole:

Oh, yeah. I'm trying to get out there more than I normally would just to get the-

Sarah Ellis:

Practice.

Alan Poole:

... get the practice.

Sarah Ellis:

Yeah.

Alan Poole:

Right. So to be part of an opportunity for someone to maybe get their career back on track after a lost time, I know that was something that was on my mind as we were digging out of the pandemic.

Sarah Ellis:

Everybody. Even if you kept your job, you still had the worry of what's to come. And so I hope that we can provide ... Not to use hope again, but we can provide some hope.

Alan Poole:

Yeah. Absolutely. Well, this was just a wonderful conversation.

Sarah Ellis:

Yes. Thank you for having me.

Alan Poole:

Absolutely.

Sarah Ellis:

This was fantastic. You did a great job.

Alan Poole:

Well, thank you. You did too. And this makes me even more excited for the coming year than I was before we talked. That's a success in my book.

Sarah Ellis:

It is. Thank you.

Copyright, Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders LLP. These recorded materials are designed for educational purposes only. This podcast is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are solely those of the individual participants. Troutman Pepper does not make any representations or warranties, express or implied, regarding the contents of this podcast. Information on previous case results does not guarantee a similar future result. Users of this podcast may save and use the podcast only for personal or other non-commercial, educational purposes. No other use, including, without limitation, reproduction, retransmission or editing of this podcast may be made without the prior written permission of Troutman Pepper. If you have any questions, please contact us at [troutman.com](http://troutman.com).