



Next Move Group

We Are Jobs Podcast

with Special Guest: Raul Peralta

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Chad Chancellor: Welcome to this week's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast. This is Chad Chancellor, co-founder of Next Move Group and I'm glad to have Raul Peralta with us today from ECS Limited. He is the senior vice president of ECS Southeast and they are an engineering firm that does all kind of work for manufacturers and helping economic development organizations and so forth. So, Raul, thank you for being with us today.

Raul Peralta: My pleasure. Glad to be here.

Chad Chancellor: Why don't you just tell these folks a little bit about ECS and kind of what you all do?

Raul Peralta: ECS is the consummate practice of American business. It was started by an individual from North Carolina, NC State graduate; moved to Washington DC and decided that he wanted to do things on his own. He formed his own company and 40 years later, we are 1200 employees and 60 offices throughout the United States. We're divided into subsidiaries, so we divide the country and our mission is to not only provide good services to our clients but dominate the markets that we serve. We do that by providing on-time and cost effective solutions to issues related to economic development.

Chad Chancellor: I know you're really strong in economic development. A matter of fact, we are recording this podcast at the Southern Economic Development Council in New Orleans in early August where I believe Raul is a chair. I guess maybe you're not there. You gave it away the other day, so now you don't have to do the hard work anymore.

Raul Peralta: Yes, this is part of the annual SEDC conference in New Orleans. I am the chair, not to correct you but to make it clear I am the chair until the end of this year.

Chad Chancellor: Oh, okay.

Raul Peralta: So, it doesn't end at the meeting, at the annual conference those calendar years. So, we've got a few more months to make good things happen.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I heard good things about the conference. So, I think it was well received. So, talk about kind of let's say there's an economic developer out there that may be inexperienced, just got in the business. How can you help them figure out if this is a good site or not or if they've already got a piece of property to get it prepared. Walk through the different menu options you have to help those folks.

Raul Peralta: As we all know in this business, having shovel-ready product is key and part of that is doing some due diligence on the piece of property in addition to, of course, having it under control and some of the other components of having a site ready, but in terms of how we help is we will-- we can do a due diligence component of that site looking at the environmental conditions of the site and then looking, of course, at the components of the site in terms of subsurface

conditions and ultimately, not only do you want to get that site shovel-ready, but you also want to determine how much of that site is buildable.

There are things that impact that concept like wetlands and rock outcroppings etc. So ultimately, what you want to do is let's say you have a hundred-acre site, you want to see how much of that acreage you can actually build on.

Chad Chancellor: Then does your team become part of the recruitment team? Let's say an economic developer has a prospect that's coming in a week from now. Do they then call you and I'm sure they've got all your reports and studies, but how do you actually interact with their prospects to try to help them through that deal?

Raul Peralta: At the risk of sounding self-serving, that would be a key to being able to answer the questions related to the real estate. For example, the last large manufacturing project that looked in the Southeast, we all know who that was, looked at several mega sites in North Carolina. We had done the due diligence on all of those sites that were looked. In addition to that, we were brought in to the conversation and actually gave the owners as well as their representatives a tour of the sites to look at specific issues and what were challenges on the site and what were advantages related to the site.

Chad Chancellor: So, considering how strong you all are in the southeast, the question I get asked a lot with the different stuff we do is what is too small of a site? So, let's say a community doesn't have a lot of resources and maybe they filled up an industrial park and they want to go out there and try to develop another one. If you had to give your advice on what's just the minimum you need to start with, what would it be?

Raul Peralta: Well, the south is continuously looking for good property. There is no magic number. There's no minimum. It all depends on the size of the project and what's required. I would urge you to think more on the infrastructure associated with that site and how it would relate to the sectors or the particular customer or project that you are pursuing. We've worked on sites as small as 25 acres and as large as 2,000 acres. Obviously, those sites are better in tune for different projects and different sectors, if you will.

Chad Chancellor: I was somewhere last week and they only-- they didn't have a hundred-acre site. They had like 80 acres and they were almost embarrassed to show it to me because somebody had told them that's not enough and I said oh yes, 80 acres let's at least look at it. Do not think that if you only got 80 acres-- because everybody here is mega size and all and sometimes maybe people think well, we just don't have enough acreage here to do anything.

Raul Peralta: I think the key, if I may interrupt you, the key is how many of those acres are actually buildable. What can you do with an 80-acre site and what can you do with a 50-acre site? That's the key.

Chad Chancellor: And so, within the southeast, what is kind of your territory that you cover? What do you all consider the southeast?

Raul Peralta: We consider the southeast North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Kentucky and I mentioned those names not to leave anyone out because there are certainly more states in the southeast, but that is where our current footprint is with Louisiana being the latest office that we've opened. We literally just opened up an office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana a couple of weeks ago.

Chad Chancellor: I didn't know that. Welcome.

Raul Peralta: Thank you. We want to serve this market and there are certainly plenty of opportunities in the state of Louisiana and I say this not just because I'm here, but the state of Louisiana is a very active state and very pro-business, which is wonderful.

Chad Chancellor: And I think you'll do well here. We recently did an executive search for the World Trade Center in New Orleans where everybody that's on that board are the ports up and down the river and ECD. So, we got familiar with some of those sites and we're running out of river. There's still some river land, but it needs to be developed and like you said, you got to figure out what's buildable. So, I'm glad to hear. I'm glad to hear that you all are doing that. Have you all participated in any of the state utility site certification programs or what would you advise for folks if they want to go through something like that?

Raul Peralta: We do participate in those quite heavily. It is our intention to help early on in the process get product ready. Every state has their own version of what a certified site is and even

within states, there are different programs that are utilized to market sites and market them as being shovel-ready. The biggest component of a successful site certification program, in my humble opinion, is use some common sense with a budget that you may have available. There is such a thing as overspending for minimal return. Let's not forget this is part of a marketing program for sites, so we recognize and we're always encouraging people to be smart with their budgets and the amount of work that's being done on the site knowing that within a certain amount of time some of that work may be out of date, it may have to be updated.

Chad Chancellor: So, you all do the environment and geotech. Do you do anything-- I've been to some sites lately and they all have kind of renderings where they can put-- do you guys do any of that or you have partners I'm sure that if folks are asking you can bring in?

Raul Peralta: We do bring in partners more on the civil engineering side to lay out the site and what's found. Again, with the ultimate focus being on what's buildable.

Chad Chancellor: What advice would you have through your SEDC connections for economic developers? It seems like now there are so many training programs and conferences. I get asked hey, which one should I get involved with? I always recommend SEDC because it was so helpful to me. So, talk about, in your opinion, why those events are important.

Raul Peralta: There are several reasons. One would be career advancement or career development. I think ultimately, the content is valuable in terms of developing additional skills and understanding what's coming down that's going to impact. For instance, this year's SEDC conference the title of it was Brave New World with a specific emphasis on what's coming down the pipe and what is going to be disruptive in the economic development practice.

Last but not least, is the networking that takes place during these conferences. So, there is a technical production that goes into it, but let's face it, we all recognize that networking and making those connections whether you're a competitor of another local community or whether you are a service provider as we are, the networking is a key component to this practice.

Chad Chancellor: Well, and you know automotive is changing and because of the south we have so many people with big automotive plants and it's been so important to our growth and with

electric cars coming that whole game is changing. So, I think you are right to make a conference figure what's coming next and what might disrupt it and what might disrupt the market.

Raul Peralta: It's funny you should mention that because as part of this conference that we just completed, we had an hour-long panel with three experts; one from Toyota, one from Daimler, and one from the Clemson University Automotive Center in Clemson, South Carolina and they all talked about the changes that are coming to those vehicles that we won't recognize them in certainly 10-20 years with electricity and connectivity and share riding and all kinds of concepts that we as economic developers and local communities and states need to prepare for.

Chad Chancellor: Well, that's happening right now. I was in a community recently with one of the big OEMs. I won't say which one so that it doesn't come across anyway, but they are already having their suppliers transition some of the parts they are making into fitting some of the electrical vehicles. So, literally as we speak, it's kind of changing their supply chain. They are doing it slowly, but over the next few years, they are going to change their supply chain and so the community I was in said we got to get our arms around it and figure out what this is going to mean to us.

Raul Peralta: If I may add to that, we are always looking for trends as I know economic developers are and currently, I would suggest that the trend is logistics and just-in-time delivery. We have found, because of what we are working on as I speak to you, that manufacturing of batteries or battery plants will be or have the potential to be the next wave of manufacturing projects that will look through the southeast looking to be able to provide those batteries to these electric cars that are coming our way.

Chad Chancellor: If we get you to put your ECS hat back on, can you guys do-- what is your menu I guess of pre-diligence. Let's say a community is looking at three different pieces of property. Can they hire you to come in and help them figure out which one is going to be easiest to develop without spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to do testing? I guess what's kind of-- if a community doesn't yet own a property, but I'm sure you have something where you can advise them hey, property B is better. How does that work for you?

Raul Peralta: First, let me say that we are always whether it's signed or not signed, we are always working as if we are under an NDA. So, many times we see the challenge that we are working for

the same project in different sites. So, we utilize the power of an NDA to make sure that we don't violate the confidentiality that's involved.

Our services include really looking at a site and determining what the risk is and then minimizing that risk. For instance, if there are wetlands on a site well, the risk is the wetlands, but it's not an impossible thing to overcome. We just have to find a way that it doesn't take years to get a permit and we can take that, again, we'll use a theoretical site, 100-acres site and place that building where you can minimize the impact not only of the wetlands so we can all be good stewards of the environment but also minimize the impact on the budget and the cost that the client needs to stick to.

Chad Chancellor: Well, now that you've got an office in Louisiana, we got flood plains and we're sitting here four feet below the sea probably where we are right now. So, the geotechnical is going to be highly, highly important. We've done some work recently up in east Kentucky on some old coal mines and that geotechnical is just so important. So, this is such an important step. Is there anything that you would have liked for me to ask you that I didn't that you'd like to share with the public about ECS, SEDC, either one?

Raul Peralta: Well, we've talked a lot about SEDC and that's an organization that's near and dear to my heart having served as a chairman for that this year, but I'll also tell you that we are heavily involved in the local state organizations and we urge all that are listening to certainly look at those organizations and become a viable member of them and then look at SEDC as one way to sort of spread your wings and in a very friendly manner look, and see what your neighbors are doing and learn from the good things they are doing and learn from the things that maybe are not working so well.

Chad Chancellor: And you all are strong. You have had a lot of economic development conferences. You've got a good team there that knows what they are doing. So, if you're listening out there to us folks and you're thinking about a new site or you're thinking about doing diligence on your site, you can find a lot of the ECS folks at your next state conference or SEDC or so forth. Why don't you give these people your contact or webpage in case they want to learn more about you?

Raul Peralta: You can find our website at ecslimited.com.

Chad Chancellor: All right. Thank you, Raul. Is there anything else you want to share with our audience?

Raul Peralta: Love the south. Let's keep it friendly for businesses and we'll all be successful.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you. Glad to have you in New Orleans and proud to hear you all opened an office here. Thank you.

Raul Peralta: Thank you.

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Chad Chancellor: A special thank you to Younger Associates for recording, editing, and publishing this podcast for us. I encourage you to visit their website at younger-associates.com.