Principal Architect

Job Description

Principal Architects drive the growth of professional services related to passenger stations, multi-modal transportation infrastructure, and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). Guiding **initial design concepts and ideas through successful project completion on multiple project types**.

Salary
Entry — $87,262
Middle — $93,829
Top — $105,088

Core Tasks

- Provide architectural design and documentation assistance to the team on various building, metro, and infrastructure design projects.

- Provide design creativity, foresight, and mature judgment in anticipating and solving routine and unusual problems, articulating objectives and requirements, organizing programs and project approaches, and developing standards and guidelines.

Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**
  Approx. 40 hours/week
  (At key milestones overtime work may be required to meet deadlines)

- **Environment**
  Typical **office environment**, may meet with clients and projects stakeholders on-site

- **Travel**
  May be required to travel **to building sites**

Education / Prerequisites

Education Level
Bachelor's or Master's degree in Architecture or a related field.

Licensing
Professional License as Architect (RA, AIA) or Planner (AICP)

Pre-Job Preparation
8-10 years of increasingly responsible experience in the field of architecture.

Experience

Soft Skills
- Strong Leadership Skills
- Excellent Writing and Communication
- Creative Problem Solving

Technical Skills
- Proficiency in software (Revit, Autocad, MS Excel, and Word)
- Strong knowledge of building codes
- Knowledge of current trends in architecture

Career Path: Gavin Schaefer

About Me

Principal Architect at Sound Transit

Master of Science in Sustainable Urban Development from the University of Oxford

Early Interests

"I definitely didn't have a straight pathway, I actually did grades 11 and 12 through correspondence classes, so I was working while I finished high school. I was working in warehouses, on construction sites, doing freelance creative work like web design and photography. I always felt like I wanted to do something to help the community, make a contribution, you know. So, I ended up going to university to study psychology. I really loved how psychology put people first and tried to improve people's lives directly. I was thinking of becoming a counselor or a lab researcher or even going into psychiatry.

A Pivotal Moment

"After my undergrad, I ended up volunteering with a program serving disadvantaged youth in a neighborhood known as Canada's poorest postal code. One of the things we did was help to design the community center, there was an architect working with us who was working pro bono, it was very inspirational. I was really impressed how he took this complicated problem that had so many variables, and he managed to condense it into a solution on a whiteboard. I was kind of like, 'Ah, this is this is it.' It's creative, you're working with people, you're solving problems, and you're making an impact on the community. So, I went to architecture school. "

Into the Real World

"After working for a while, I realized that architects needed a real holistic view of design and construction, so I decided early in my career to start seeing problems from different angles. I started an Executive Master's program at the University of Oxford in Sustainable Urban Development. So, I was going overseas, I was meeting with these people from all over the world, which was incredible, they're representing different communities with lots of different problems, backgrounds, professions. I was also working at the City of Vancouver, Canada on the policy side—which is famous for its sustainable design—it's a very dense, mixed-use type of city. After that, I immigrated to the United States with my wife in 2019 to work at a large construction tech startup. This was a really great opportunity to make a really big impact, I got to travel all over the US and sometimes the world. It was really inspiring, I met a lot of great people, and got exposed to the US market which was great, as I was a newcomer here. After that, I wanted to get back more directly into my roots, serving the community. With Sound Transit, being such a large project with so many stations, it seemed like the perfect thing, and so I've been very fortunate to be a part of it and help with the vision here."

About My Job

"I'm really fortunate to work in a career where I get to learn constantly. Everything is changing."

Pros

- "I really do love the fact that we're building out the transit system of the future every day. That's great. We're really on the cutting edge of design technology, so we're always looking at ways to improve our processes. It's an exciting time to be in the construction industry. A lot of things are changing, and **just the scale of it is inspiring.**"
- "A lot of my time is **listening and building consensus** to ensure we're doing the right thing and we're balancing competing objectives, because our work is touching so many people. It's really important that we get it right."

Cons

- "I will say it **comes with its own set of challenges.** So when you're doing large scale infrastructure, you need to coordinate a lot of different people with different objectives and opinions."
- "As an architect, I'm not actually the one doing a lot of the drawings for the stations. I do help inform them, but a lot of **my role isn't that tangible**, which is a consideration with the role that I'm in."

Fieldwork

- "I go out to the **projects that are under construction**, I get input when I'm out there and help make decisions. I go to the sites where we haven't even started building anything yet to look and see what the future might look like. And I **also visit our existing stations** to find ways to improve them."

Office Work

- "On any given day, I could either be in the field or I could be in the office. It's a **majority in the office** in my role. It's pretty typical for most architects, unless they're focused on being in the field."
- "I'm fortunate to **work with a lot of different people from different backgrounds**. I get to collaborate with contractors, engineers, other architects, artists, researchers and the public to better inform our designs."

Skills

- "**Don't underestimate your soft skills.** I think they're becoming more and more important as technology improves. A lot of it is listening to your client, the community, the city, to understand what they're trying to get out of these projects.
- "**You need to have those hard skills.** You need to be able to draft, you need to be able to 3D model and represent and all that."
- "One of the things that architects bring to a project a lot of the time is **the ability to picture it when you're looking at a plan in your head,** being able to convey that information in a way that's understood to other people is immensely valuable.

Education/Experience

- "If you're going right through school, **there's two options.** You can go right from your undergraduate and do a longer program, or you can do what I did, where you get an undergraduate and then you do a graduate degree. I don't think that one is necessarily better than the other."
- "I will say that **work experience is extremely important as an architect**, and to get registered, you have to log a certain amount of hours and take some exams. You need to be able to help serve the communities, help serve your clients, and have that professional responsibility associated with it."

The Future of Architecture

"From the outside-in, a lot of people look at architecture and design as being really susceptible to disruption from AI because there's a lot of AI models that can put out a reasonable looking building pretty quickly, right? You'll see something that looks pretty captivating. I really welcome this type of thinking, rendering technology is really improving quickly, so being able to put out those visualizations that used to take a long time. I had a super computer that I would work as a side job and sell some renderings and things like that, and you don't need that anymore. But, if you pay attention to everything I described in what I do, very little of that is actually the reality of architecture practice, the challenge and the value in design, it comes from the **professional responsibility of designing things that work in a complex environment** where you have to balance a lot of things. So I don't think that's going to change with transit or with transit design. So what I've observed in my career is that **technology makes things like drawing production easier**, but then the regulatory environment and what's being demanded of you just gets more. So I think as technology improves and the industry changes, that ability to collaborate is just going to be more and more important."

About Sustainability Ambassadors

We are here to *RAPIDLY ADVANCE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.* Empowering *YOUTH* to catalyze community sustainability, *TEACHERS* to integrate rigor with relevance for real-world impact, *COMMUNITY* to drive collective impact.

We support a year-round training program for over 60 highly motivated middle and high school youth, a Teacher Fellows Program, City-County CAP internships, and college-level interns, and work with hundreds of educators to design new models of problem-based, place-based learning around *a shared vision of educating for sustainability.*

Your Green Jobs Future

Ready to explore your future in green jobs? Use *Map your Career* to map your trajectory!

Find career opportunities near you now! Use *Career Connect - Washington's* tool to find programs to build your career skills.

Interested in a future in solar? Take a look at the *Solar Jobs Census* to track solar job growth nationwide.

Explore *RVC's opportunities* to work with organizations led by communities of color.

Dive into the *Center of Excellence for Clean Energy's* robust career tools in the sustainable energy sector.

Grow your professional sustainability skillset with the *Seattle Youth Good Program.*

See Seattle's *Clean Energy Resources Map* to examine what the city is planning for a greener energy future.

Check out the *U.S. Green Building Council* to explore the sector's current opportunities. :

Funder Acknowledgement