

# NATIONAL POST

## Olivia Chow vows to create 5,000 jobs for youths with new program

Natalie Alcoba | May 13, 2014 12:02 PM ET



Olivia Chow says she intends to create 5,000 jobs for youths by demanding that companies awarded big city capital projects employ people who are under 24 years old.

Ms. Chow announced the latest plank of her mayoral campaign on Industry Street, in front of the derelict lands in Weston that used to be a hub of activity at the Kodak factory. Now, birds float listlessly on ponds of water around the last building standing, a white structure boarded up with aluminum to keep drug users out.

“Good morning,” began Ms. Chow, under gloomy clouds. “It’s actually not a good morning for a lot of young people,” she said, quoting an unemployment figure among young people of 22.5%.

To bring that down, she will negotiate “community benefits agreements” for all major infrastructure and capital projects to include apprenticeships and jobs for people under 24 who live in Toronto.

She says they were used to create more than 500 local jobs as part of the Regent Park redevelopment and were also used in during the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

Her requirement would only apply to contracts over \$50-million and would not stipulate that the workers come from the immediate area of the project. The city already hires 5,000 youths in parks and recreation programs. The goal is to generate 5,000 more jobs and apprenticeships over four years.

“It’s a win-win situation for the private sector. It helps them rejuvenate their workforce, it helps create hope for young people,” said Ms. Chow, standing before a backdrop of young campaign volunteers. Unlike her rival, John Tory, who had promised to mine his network of business contacts to help generate opportunities for youth, Ms. Chow said she had “concrete proposals.”

Ms. Chow has previously proposed hiring 300 more young people for tree planting and after-school programs.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, said he would prefer setting targets for youth employment instead of strict requirements in contracts. He worried about what might happen if a company was unable to find young workers necessary to complete the job. “You don’t want something fixed in stone that limits your ability to get the project done on time,” he said.



Councillor Michael Thompson, chair of the economic development committee, said Ms. Chow's proposal is doable, but it's going to take more than that to grapple with the number of people out of work.

"I think we need to focus how we educate our young people. There's a lot of jobs. We just don't have the right skill set to match the needs that exists for those particular jobs," said Mr. Thompson.

A spokesperson for John Tory, who will be announcing his own plan for jobs on Wednesday, said the campaign is "not opposed to community benefits, but we're very concerned that Olivia Chow's plan would create another NDP bureaucracy, and make it harder for businesses to work with City Hall and actually get things done."

David Soknacki, another mayoral candidate, agrees that the city should absolutely be concerned with enhancing job opportunities, especially for those starting out in their careers. While demanding jobs for young people might make sense for certain projects, it might not for areas that require skill, risk, or training, he said.

"I've always been concerned about these blanket rules because what happens is you'll find it makes good politics but lousy policy," he said.