



Architect Vivian Manasc, middle, exchanges ideas with concepts for the new Eastwood Health Centre, which has caused some controversy in the surrounding community.

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# Architect builds pillars of trust in Eastwood

## Health-centre objections smoothed over in face-to-face meeting

KAREN KLEISS  
Journal Staff Writer  
EDMONTON

Architect Vivian Manasc is trying to mend fences in a community that is bitterly divided over Capital Health's decision to build the multi-million dollar Eastwood Public Health Centre on the site of the old Cromdale school.

She has talked to the residents who will live beside the new building, to health care workers who will staff it, to aboriginal teenagers who attend nearby Amiskwacy Academy, because she believes public consultation is the foundation of sustainable architecture.

It is the first time Capital Health has undertaken such extensive public consultations — and it appears to be working. Residents got a first look at the early plans Tuesday night, and by and large they approved.

"I think people want to be involved," Manasc told the group of about 50 people who gathered to see the plans at Santa Maria Goretti Hall.

"We all have a serious stake in the well-being of our communities, and I think ultimately we don't trust the experts anymore. Some of us have been wronged before."

Capital Health's announcement that it would build the \$8-million Eastwood Public Health Centre at 11240 79th St. touched off an explosive community controversy.

The health authority said the site is ideal for the centre, which will provide round-the-clock urgent care to 60,000 people and give them access to nurse-practitioners, public health nurses, dietitians, dental hygienists and addiction counsellors.

The space was big enough, and came at an affordable price, \$425,000. Capital Health hired public relations firm



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Calder Bateman and rolled out the plan.

Residents were furious. Some worried about the traffic, others were concerned about long-term plans to provide methadone treatment for drug addicts and supportive housing. Some said it would chew into the area's green spaces, that construction would be too noisy, that property values would plummet.

People on the other side of the fence said those residents had a bad case of NIMBY — not in my backyard — syndrome.

Coun. Ed Gibbons said Capital Health pushed the project through even though the community had repeatedly voiced its opposition.

But the consultations, led by Manasc

and backed by Capital Health, have quelled the anger. On Tuesday, even the most cynical residents took coloured markers to the architectural drawings, adding swaths of green, new diagrams and writing extensive memos to the designers.

"We don't feel listened to by Capital Health, but we feel listened to by the architects," resident Sophia Tymchyshyn said as she leaned over the drafts with some of her neighbours.

"They have the right idea in terms of the green space."

Manasc recounted for the residents what she heard them say at the first meeting: More green space, underground parking, keep the historic Cromdale school standing.

All those requests were honoured in the draft plans presented at the meeting.

"As a former student of the school, I'm thrilled to see it is part of the new plan," said Elizabeth Giroux, who still lives in the area.

"I work in health care, and I know how bad the shortage of space is. I'm happy with this plan."

The plans presented Tuesday may still change, but residents will get to see them once more.

Marianne Stewart, Capital Health's senior operations officer for primary care, said they must first go through a process of internal approval and may need to be tempered to meet city regulations related to parking and bus routes.

She said by the end of summer, the authority hopes to pass the final proposal to Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation, which holds the purse strings.

Health Minister Iris Evans in October committed \$23 million to the project, as part of a \$647 million injection into Edmonton-area health care.

kkleiss@thejournal.canwest.com