



"Density really changes the way that we experience the streets, the way we experience our neighbours, the way we experience the city..." says HIGHRISE director Katerina Cizek. (Shown is a scene from the documentary.)

# NFB film looks at T.O.'s HIGHRISE revolution

**Condo trends.**  
Documentary maker embraces 'digital storytelling' to talk about tower renewal

**DUNCAN MCALLISTER**  
life@metronews.ca  
twitter: @nebulix

Toronto is becoming a city of condos. But well before the condo boom, many of Toronto's original concrete high-rises were built between the 1950s and the 1980s. Thousands of units across the city were mixed with single-family homes and businesses.

The sad truth of the matter is that today these concrete apartment towers are

aging and inefficient. With the Toronto region containing North America's second-largest concentration of these buildings, the City of Toronto has embarked on an initiative to renew these urban towers, and they're taking a long look at green infrastructure, transportation, waste management and energy consumption.

Emmy award-winning director Katerina Cizek has spent years examining Toronto's modernist high-rises of the postwar era. She's the creative force behind HIGHRISE, a bold new multi-year, multi-media, collaborative documentary experiment at the National Film Board of Canada.

Cizek tells Metro, "We've been working on the NFB high

rise project since the first idea came forward around 2008, when the city was publicly developing its ideas around tower renewal and we were inspired by that."

There are over 1,000 residential apartment towers found all across Toronto. Cizek explains that "Density really changes the way that we experience the streets, the way we experience our neighbours, the way we experience the city, and there's no question about it that density is the way the world needs to go because we're becoming more and more urban."

HIGHRISE breaks new ground in the digital realm. "We're moving towards digital storytelling and new ways of telling stories, new ways of delivering stories, new ways



Model suite from 15 Dundonald. COURTESY STARLIGHT APARTMENTS

of communicating and organizing our relationships with the people that we make the films with, and also the people that are formerly known as the audience, now called users," says Cizek.

If a building owner is committed to tower renewal, great things can happen. A relatively new player in the rental industry, Starlight Apartments has been acquiring a number of Toronto's aging concrete buildings and converting them to condo-like units.

Case in point is 15 Dundonald St. near Yonge. This 23-story '60s-era building has undergone an extreme makeover.

Starlight has upgraded just about everything imaginable including elevators, laundry facilities, the lobby and exterior landscaping.

The ultra-modern open-concept suites have been designed by Daniel Johnson Architect and include rich, dark-coloured cabinetry, stainless steel appliances, ceramic tile and hardwood floors. With this kind of renewal, you'd think you were living in a brand new condominium instead of a 40-year-old building.

HIGHRISE CAN BE VIEWED ONLINE AT HIGHRISE.NFB.CA



Scene from HIGHRISE. COURTESY NFB