Building O has the beans spilled on the New Project at 201 North Columbus Drive

Columbus Drive gets a new high rise, (Building O 201 North Columbus Drive) and there has been a lot of interest in what it will become. The time has arrived to spill some beans. The 642-foot-tall building is broken into four components. At the base are a pair of hotel lobbies, a residential lobby, and 10,000 square feet of retail space. Why two hotel lobbies? Because the building sports two hotels on the lower floors. The lobbies are arranged sequentially along the south side of the driveway that currently serves Aqua’s ballrooms and parking garage. This is the space that would be Upper East Lake Street, if that street hadn’t been co-opted a block earlier to become the Aon Center’s private driveway. Toward the North Columbus Drive end of the base is retail space. A lot of work has been put into making sure this is an “active” space, and not just another dead Chicago parking podium. Parking will be in the levels below the false grade of Upper Columbus Drive. It will consist of 197 spaces as an extension of the Aqua parking garage. Having it configured as an extension, with no entrances or exits of its own, skirts the possibility of running afoul of agreements the city has for not approving new non-resident parking in the downtown area. And adding three lobbies, valet stations, taxi stands, and retail to what is essentially a dead-end should certainly perk up the activity level here. This location has been screaming for a traffic light for years. Because of a series of close calls, last year 42nd Ward Alderman Brendan Reilly got CDOT to put in signs making the pedestrian crossings more visible to clueless tourists and careless cabbies. Adding two hotels and an apartment tower onto an intersection already used by a huge office building, two other hotels, an apartment block and a condo block could be the traffic density needed for CDOT to finally go all the way. And it’s not just Upper Columbus getting activated. Four thousand square feet of the retail space will face the park, and adjoin the Mezcalina restaurant/coffee shop. The base of Building O will also fulfill a long-awaited Lakeshore East dream: a pedway connection between the main underground grid and the Mariano’s supermarket at the Village Market building. The sad part is that it’s a connection through a parking garage, but we can add two more locations to the big list of coffee shops accessible in the dead of winter through the pedway.

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