Willis Tower opened in 1973 as the Sears Tower and the world’s tallest building at 1,450 feet (442 meters). In need of modernization to remain competitive in the office marketplace, a $500+ million transformation is introducing extensive tenant amenities at various office levels and a 4-story base, called Catalog, featuring dining, retail, and entertainment under a gigantic skylight with a roof garden sprawled out beneath the tower. The revamped Willis Tower now meets the street with greater sensitivity, with Catalog replacing a block-long pink granite wall and sunken entrance on Jackson Blvd for a more welcoming pedestrian experience.

This repositioning project is only one high-profile example of efforts across the office sector to future-proof aging 1960s and 1970s buildings, often too big or too important to demolish or let languish. The inventory of buildings needing this type of overhaul now or in the near future is enormous and represents one of the greatest challenges for American downtowns.

Further reading:
Willis Tower unveils Catalog. Press release, September 13, 2018.
Willis Tower redo makes iconic skyscraper more inviting, less dramatic. Blair Kamin, Chicago Tribune, February 1, 2017.