

3.9 VISUAL RESOURCES

This section describes the views to and from I-25 within the project corridor. Views of significant features, vistas, and viewsheds — either natural (such as the mountains) or built (such as the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills) — are considered important visual resources that define the visual character of an area. Project alternatives are analyzed to determine how proposed improvements would impact the visual character of the corridor.

3.9.1 Affected Environment

Pueblo's regional planning efforts, as documented in the *Pueblo Regional Development Plan (Pueblo Comprehensive Plan)* (Pueblo Area Council of Governments [PACOG], 2002), identified visual resources as an issue of region-wide concern. As part of these planning efforts, Pueblo citizens provided lists of desired physical changes that included building an "attractive community." Building an attractive community would include implementation of beautification programs and creating attractive entrances into Pueblo along major highways such as I-25. Residents also expressed concern about the loss of mountain views and the lack of landscaping and vegetation in new residential and commercial developments.

Fifteen guiding principles were developed as part of the planning process to establish a framework for the *Pueblo Comprehensive Plan*. One principle, "to encourage development that adds to the aesthetic quality of the region," relates directly to the preservation and enhancement of visual resources in Pueblo (PACOG, 2002).

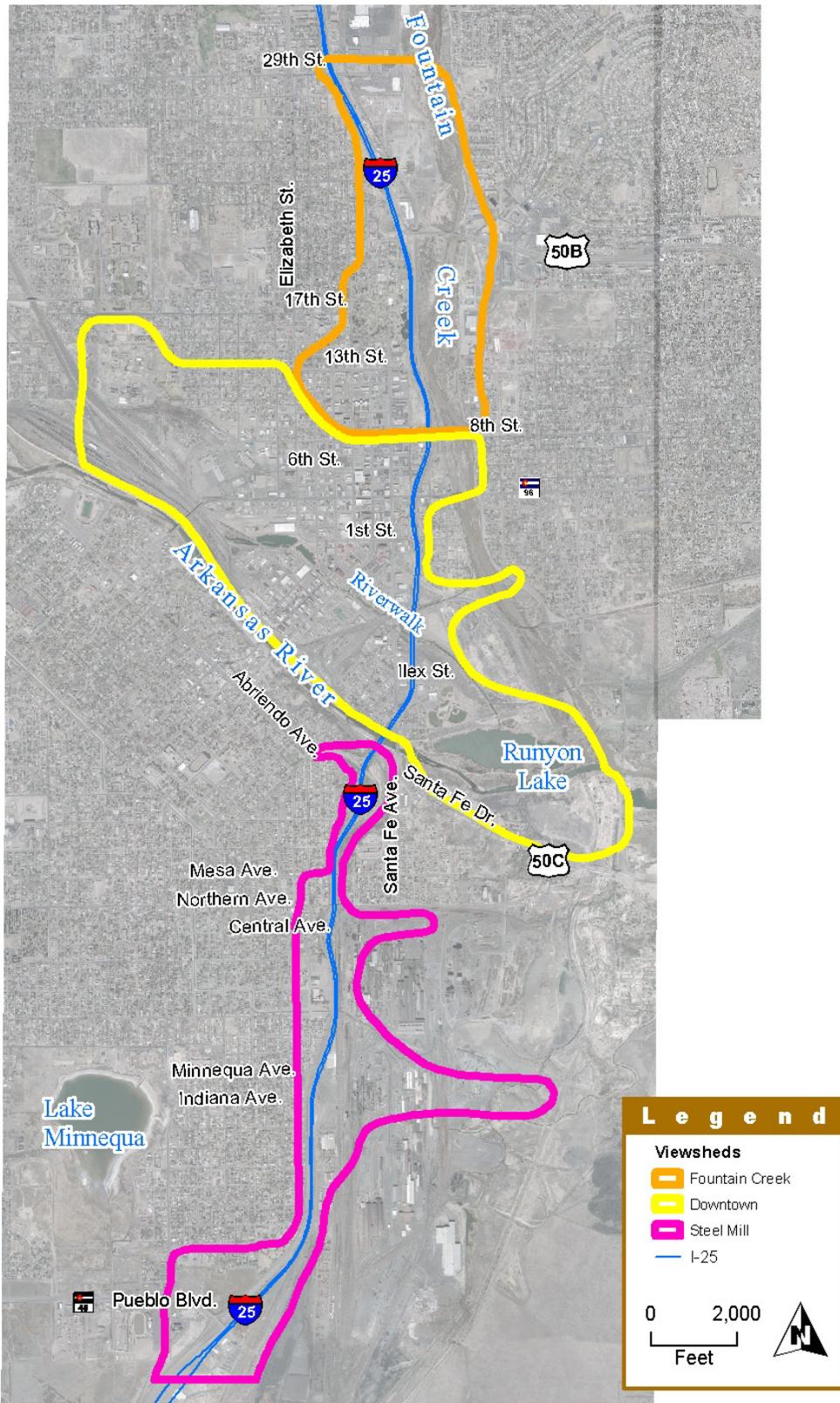
To understand how the New Pueblo Freeway project could affect the aesthetic quality of the City, urban designers

assessed the existing views within the I-25 corridor and identified viewsheds that define distinct scenic areas along the corridor. A viewshed is a geographical area that is defined on all sides by significant landforms or manmade elements that terminate a view. From whatever point within the viewshed a viewer stands, the view is contained or limited to the area of the viewshed. For the purposes of this DEIS, the study area has been defined by three different and distinct viewsheds: the Fountain Creek Viewshed, the Downtown Viewshed, and the Steel Mill Viewshed. **Exhibit 3.9-1** shows the boundaries of these three viewsheds.

Aesthetic Guidelines were prepared as part of the highway improvement design process, and are included in **Appendix C**. These guidelines were developed using a multidisciplinary approach that involved participation from stakeholders – interested citizens, businesses, local merchant groups, local artists, transportation and highway design professionals, elected officials, and staff from both the City of Pueblo and Pueblo County. They reflect community values that are sensitive to both environmental and community resources while achieving the Purpose and Need for the project. While the Aesthetic Guidelines were developed to enhance the three viewsheds in the study area, future transportation projects would be encouraged to draw from the Aesthetic Guidelines to incorporate a unified visual aesthetic throughout the corridor.

Further details on visual resources in the project area may be found in the *Visual Impacts Technical Memorandum, New Pueblo Freeway* (CH2M HILL, 2008b).

EXHIBIT 3.9-1
Viewsheds in I-25 Corridor



3.9.1.1 Fountain Creek Viewshed

The Fountain Creek Viewshed extends from the 29th Street interchange on the north to the 8th Street bridge on the south. This viewshed is unique within the study area due to a strong presence of mature tree stands that exist in the floodplain between Fountain Creek and I-25 and Mineral Palace Park. Fountain Creek and its surrounding floodplain is the dominant visual feature. Views into the floodplain, Mineral Palace Park, and the 29th Avenue detention ponds enhance the natural appearance of the viewshed for motorists on I-25 and local residents living in the area. Views both to and from I-25 are greatly opened up in the winter months when the extensive vegetation has lost its leaves. **Exhibit 3.9-2** shows a portion of the Fountain Creek Viewshed.

Views from I-25

The eastern edge of the viewshed is defined by residential and commercial buildings that line the Fountain Creek floodplain. In the northern portion of the viewshed, residential neighborhoods on the west side of the highway act as a visual barrier to motorists looking to the west on I-25. On the southern end of the viewshed, views to the

west open up, exposing the north end of downtown Pueblo. Notable visual features in the Fountain Creek Viewshed include Mineral Palace Park, the Pueblo County building between 10th Street and 11th Street, Fountain Creek, and the flood wall with art tiles north of 8th Street along the east side of I-25.

Views of I-25

In this viewshed, I-25 is visible to anyone standing in the Fountain Creek floodplain. Neighborhoods east of Fountain Creek and north of US 50B have a clear view of the highway, and residents in the North Side Neighborhood west of I-25 also have a good view of the highway. The I-25 right-of-way (ROW) is lined by a chain-link fence in this viewshed, so the highway is highly visible from Mineral Palace Park and Mineral Palace Towers (a senior residential high-rise building on the west side of the highway). Within the North Side Neighborhood, glimpses of I-25 can also be seen looking down the neighborhood streets.

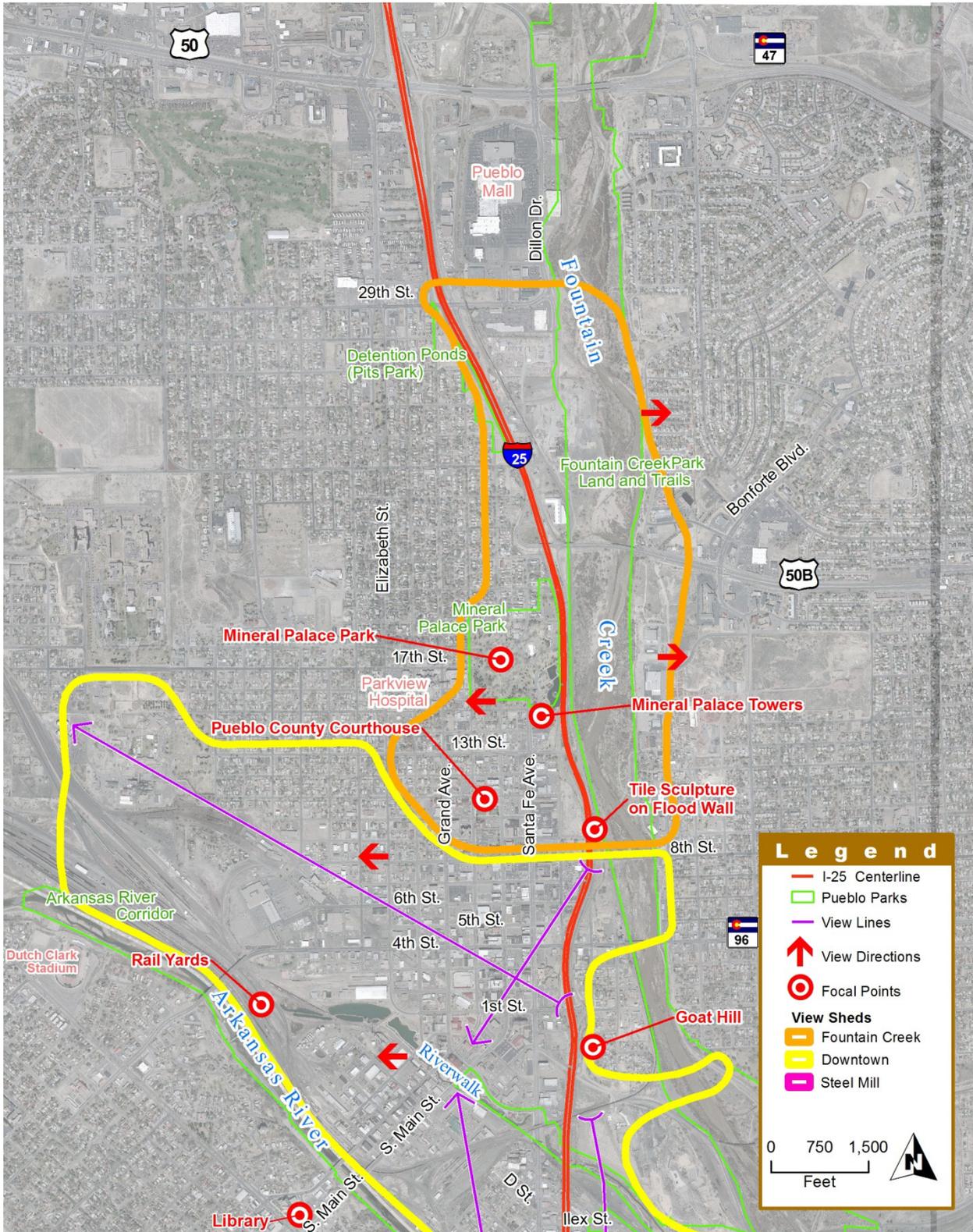
Exhibit 3.9-3 shows the view directions and focal points of the Fountain Creek Viewshed and the northern portion of the Downtown Viewshed.

EXHIBIT 3.9-2

Fountain Creek Viewshed – View Looking South at I-25 and 21st Street



EXHIBIT 3.9-3
 Visual Inventory Map for the Fountain Creek and Downtown Viewsheds



3.9.1.2 Downtown Viewshed

The Downtown Viewshed extends from the 8th Street bridge on the north to the bluffs above the Arkansas River on the south. Primarily urban, this viewshed is the largest within the project area. The Downtown Viewshed is a blend of the old and new, reflecting the heritage of Pueblo. Brick Victorian structures, the downtown rail yards, and views to the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills, the Art Center, and the Historic Arkansas River Walk Project all contribute to this blending.

On the east, the Downtown Viewshed is bounded by the eastern edge of the Fountain Creek floodplain. To the west, it is bounded by the bluffs just west of Pueblo. This viewshed is made up of the two converging floodplains associated with the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek. Along the Arkansas River, natural mature vegetation becomes a soft southern edge to the viewshed.

Views from I-25

The highway is elevated on a series of embankments and viaducts that provide motorists with an elevated view of downtown Pueblo. For the traveler, the curves along I-25 allow dramatic views of both the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills and Goat Hill. Views from I-25 into downtown Pueblo and longer-range views to the west exist for the full length of the viewshed. The bluffs just east of the Runyon

Field Sports Complex, along with Goat Hill, block long-range eastern views. Notable visual features in the Downtown Viewshed include Goat Hill, the Runyon Field Sports Complex, the bluffs along the Arkansas River, the downtown rail yards, and the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills.

Views of I-25

Although this viewshed is bounded by tall bluffs, the landscape within this viewshed is relatively flat. Because I-25 is elevated, it is a highly visible feature from downtown Pueblo and the surrounding neighborhoods. The highway is seen as a visual barrier that divides the community and this viewshed because it sits high in relationship to everything around it.

Exhibits 3.9-3 and 3.9-6 provide a visual inventory map of the Downtown Viewshed. **Exhibit 3.9-4** shows the view looking southwest from Goat Hill.

3.9.1.3 Steel Mill Viewshed

The Steel Mill Viewshed extends from the Arkansas River on the north to Pueblo Boulevard on the south. Many of the views to the east are limited by the steep embankments adjacent to I-25, along with the buildings and tailings piles at the steel mill. The western edge of the viewshed is defined by steep side slopes adjacent to I-25, a noise wall, and the rows of houses in the Bessemer Neighborhood.

EXHIBIT 3.9-4

Downtown Viewshed – View Looking Southwest from Goat Hill



The visually dominant feature of this viewshed is the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills and the associated industrial properties along the eastern side of I-25. The visual character of the steel mill and surrounding property reflects a unique industrial appearance, as shown in **Exhibit 3.9-5**. The rich history of the viewshed is evident in the many older Victorian- and Mission-style buildings located on or around the steel mill property and by the company-town-style neighborhoods surrounding the steel mill.

Mature vegetation is a key feature of the Steel Mill Viewshed, particularly north of the steel mill. Most of the vegetation on the north end of the viewshed is natural. In the southern portion of the viewshed, the mature vegetation in the Bessemer Neighborhood and JJ Raigoza Park is predominantly deciduous trees and shrubs used for landscaping.

Views from I-25

Within this viewshed, mid-range and long-range views from I-25 are limited; when they occur, they are accentuated. These views include a northbound view to downtown at the Arkansas River and several northbound views toward the

steel mill at the two gentle curves in I-25 north of Pueblo Boulevard. Dramatic views of the large steel mill buildings also exist from many of the I-25 overpasses and from the former Colorado Fuel & Iron (CF&I) Steel Mill Headquarters Building. Notable visual features in the viewshed include the railroad tracks parallel to I-25; the steel mill features such as the stoves, stacks, power house, and High Line Rail track; the former CF&I Steel Mill Headquarters Building; and the Bessemer neighborhood homes on the west side of I-25.

Views of I-25

Views of I-25 are somewhat limited in this viewshed because I-25 is recessed below adjacent neighborhoods. Mature vegetation and noise walls also block mid-range and long-range views. The High Line Rail track blocks some views of I-25 from the steel mill. The highway can be seen from the southern end of the steel mill, from JJ Raigoza Park, and down the east-west streets in the residential neighborhoods. Like the Fountain Creek Viewshed, mid-range views are opened up when the vegetation has lost its leaves in the fall and winter. **Exhibits 3.9-6 and 3.9-7** illustrate the Steel Mill Viewshed.

EXHIBIT 3.9-5

Steel Mill Viewshed – View Looking Southeast from the Northern Avenue Overpass



EXHIBIT 3.9-6
Visual Inventory Map for the Downtown and Steel Mill Viewsheds

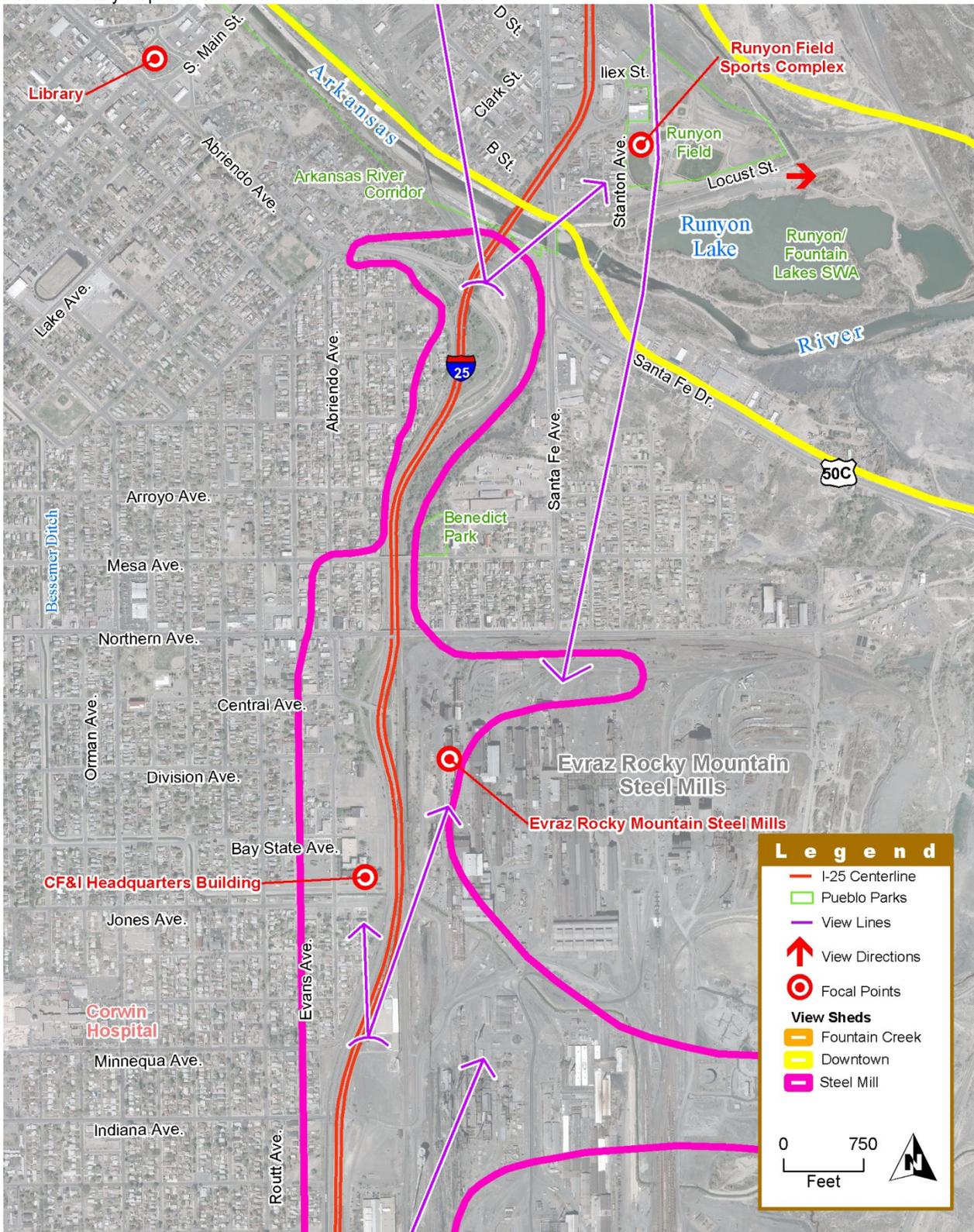
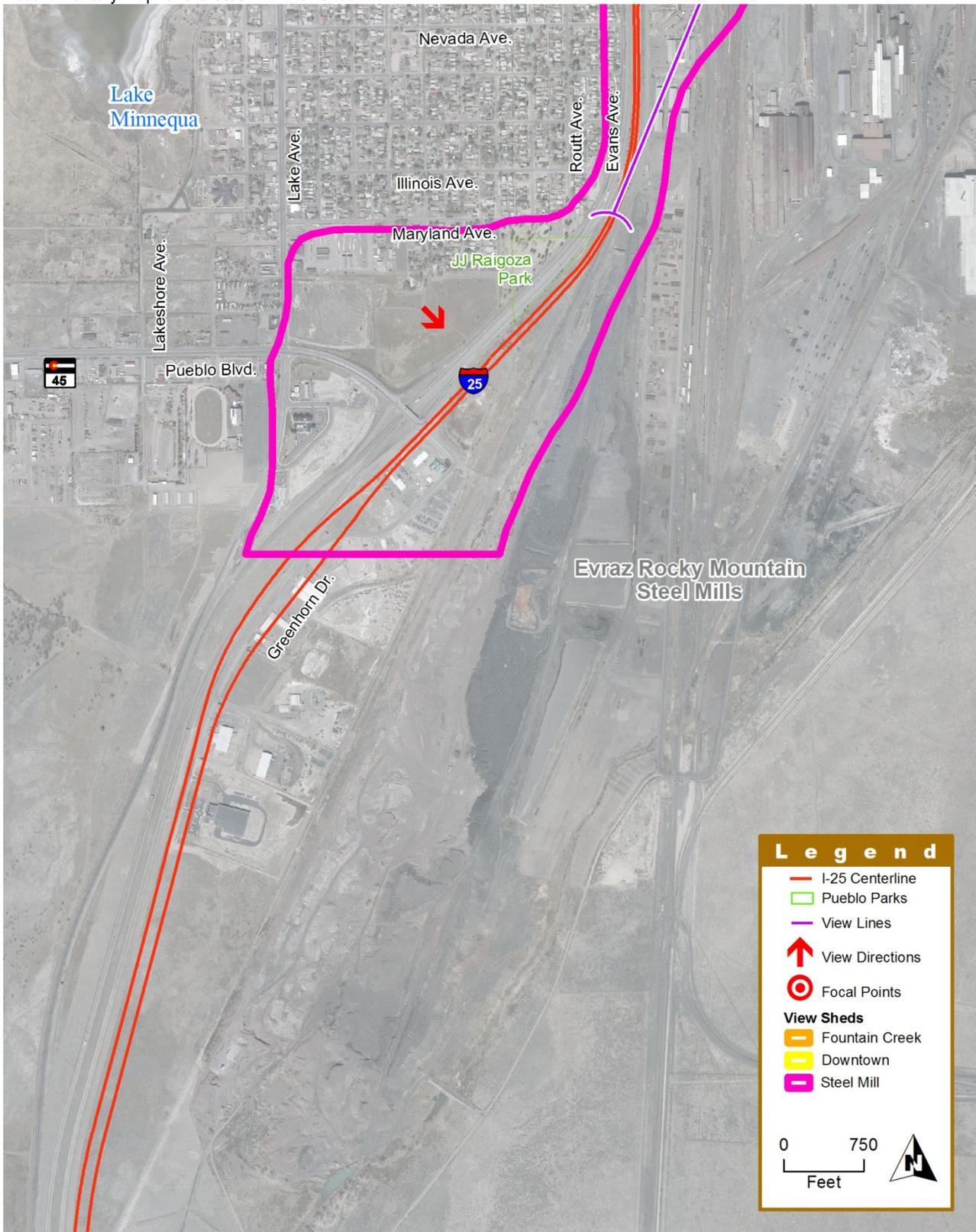


EXHIBIT 3.9-7
 Visual Inventory Map for the Steel Mill Viewshed



3.9.2 Environmental Consequences

3.9.2.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, I-25 would become increasingly congested. The resulting traffic would become more visually apparent in all viewsheds and to homes, businesses, parks, and public facilities that currently back up to the highway.

The I-25 corridor would continue to have an assortment of bridge types; fixtures with varied types of light sources; and other highway elements such as retaining walls, railings, and noise walls. Improvements to I-25 through Pueblo have been made over the past 50 years without sensitivity to its historic and environmental context.

3.9.2.2 Build Alternatives

The following discusses the impacts to viewsheds and other visual elements in the project area for the North, South, and Central areas of the project.

North Area

Noise walls would be installed to help mitigate highway noise; however, these structures can sometimes create visual impacts. This would be the case for Mineral Palace Park, the Downtown Neighborhood, the Grove Neighborhood, and other associated neighborhoods. Other visual impacts would come from the Dillon Road extension adjacent to Fountain Creek; the pedestrian bridge crossing of I-25 at Mineral Palace Park; and potentially from the construction of water quality ponds at US 50B, Mineral Palace Park, and 8th Street.

Fountain Creek Viewshed Impacts

The Existing I-25 Alternative and Modified I-25 Alternative have the same alignment north of Ilex Street. Both Build Alternatives would increase the width of the highway and modify interchanges, and both would have a higher capacity for traffic on I-25 than the No Action Alternative. Construction of the 29th Street connection, the US 50B interchange, and the 13th Street to 1st Street split-diamond interchange would all create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and fill slopes. These modifications would contrast with the mature tree stands and park-like setting of the Fountain Creek Viewshed.

The I-25 improvements would impact views from historic Mineral Palace Park, Fountain Creek, and the adjacent

historic neighborhoods by eliminating some trees and natural vegetation within the floodplain. Overall, the improvements in the Fountain Creek Viewshed would negatively impact the viewshed by giving the entire area a more developed appearance. This is a contrast to the natural and vegetated appearance in this viewshed that is valued by the community.

Downtown Viewshed Impacts

Within the Downtown Viewshed, the highway would continue to be elevated on a series of embankments, bridges, and viaducts between 6th Street and the Arkansas River. In several locations, I-25 would be 35 feet above its existing elevation between 13th Street and 6th Street, making the highway more visually apparent than it is today. Retaining walls and fill slopes along the raised portions of I-25 between 13th Street and the Arkansas River would also become a visual impact. The highway would continue to be a visually dominant element of the Downtown Viewshed, contrasting with the brick Victorian structures that are a part of Pueblo's heritage.

South Area

The reconstructed interchange at Pueblo Boulevard would create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and cut/fill slopes, contrasting with the historic company-town character of the Steel Mill Viewshed. Other visual impacts would result from the extension of Pueblo Boulevard east through the steel mill tailings pile and the water quality ponds at Pueblo Boulevard. Noise walls that are planned in the Bessemer Neighborhood would impact views both to and from JJ Raigoza Park.

Central Area

Existing I-25 Alternative

South of Ilex Street, the physical alteration of I-25 would involve an increase in the width of the highway, modifications at interchanges, and lowering of the highway between the Arkansas River and Central Avenue. The reconstructed highway would follow the existing alignment, except at Abriendo Avenue and Central Avenue. The tight curves at these locations would be straightened to improve roadway safety. The retaining walls associated with lowering and straightening I-25 would limit the views of travelers on I-25. The loss of mature, woody vegetation along I-25 in the Steel Mill Viewshed would impact all views in this viewshed.

The reconstructed interchanges at Abriendo Avenue, Northern Avenue, and Indiana Avenue would create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and cut/fill slopes, contrasting with the historic company-town character of the Steel Mill Viewshed. Other visual impacts south of Ilex Street would come from the Abriendo Avenue connection to Santa Fe Drive and the relocation of Benedict Park.

New water quality ponds at the Runyon Field Sports Complex, Abriendo Avenue, Central Avenue, and Indiana Avenue would create visual impacts. Overall, the improvements would make the highway a more visually apparent element of the viewshed, rivaling focal points like the steel mill structures and the former CF&I Steel Mill Headquarters Building. Widening the highway would require the removal of the historic High Line Rail track that runs parallel to the highway on the east side, creating a visual impact to the steel mill.

In both the Downtown Viewshed and the Steel Mill Viewshed, the Grove, Minnequa Heights, and Bessemer neighborhoods would experience visual impacts from noise walls that are planned as a part of the Existing I-25 Alternative.

Modified I-25 Alternative

South of Ilex Street, the physical alteration of I-25 involves the realignment of the highway to the east between Stanton Avenue on the north to Indiana Avenue. The former I-25 alignment between the Arkansas River and Minnequa Avenue would become an extension of Santa Fe Avenue. Multiple roadways, increased I-25 highway widths, new interchanges, and new intersections would create more ramps, structures, and cut/fill slopes within the company-town setting of the Steel Mill Viewshed. This would give the entire area a more urban appearance.

Visual impacts related to the realignment of I-25 in the Steel Mill Viewshed would result from raising the grade of I-25 approximately 30 feet on a bridge structure to pass over the existing railroad between the Bessemer Ditch and Indiana Avenue. This highway design would make I-25 more visually apparent from adjacent properties. Retaining walls in the raised portions would also have a visual impact. Raising the highway, along with the loss of mature, woody vegetation along I-25 in the Steel Mill Viewshed, would impact all views

in this viewshed. This is especially true for the Mesa neighborhoods and the Runyon/Fountain Lakes State Wildlife Area east of I-25 because the highway would move east, closer to these areas.

The extension of Stanton Road and new water quality ponds located near the Runyon Field Sports Complex, Abriendo Avenue, Central Avenue, and Minnequa Avenue would create visual impacts. Because several smoke stacks and stoves would be removed to accommodate the highway realignments, the Modified I-25 Alternative would have visual impacts to the steel mill. These steel mill structures are an obvious and key element of the South Pueblo skyline.

In both the Downtown Viewshed and the Steel Mill Viewshed, the Grove, Minnequa Heights, and Bessemer neighborhoods would experience visual impacts from noise walls that are planned as a part of the Modified I-25 Alternative.

3.9.3 Mitigation

Unless otherwise specified, the following mitigations apply to both the Existing I-25 Alternative and the Modified I-25 Alternative.

- ❖ The *New Pueblo Freeway Aesthetic Guidelines* (see **Appendix C**) will be used during final design to help CDOT identify appropriate aesthetic design elements to ensure compatibility within the community and each viewshed. CDOT is committed to following the guidelines during final design and construction.
- ❖ Measures to soften and enhance the aesthetics of the highway improvements will be implemented as identified in the March 2010 Memorandum of Understanding between the City and CDOT (see **Appendix F**). The following measures are included:
 - Gateway features for the City boundaries, downtown, and neighborhoods.
 - Architectural treatments on retaining walls, bridges, and other structures designed to reflect the architectural character of the surrounding area.
 - Landscaping of roadway shoulders with dryland grasses and creation of naturalized areas that take advantage of local runoff to allow native vegetation, including trees and shrubs, to become established.