

The State of Buckhead's Tree Canopy*

And What You Can Do About It!

*Presentation given to the Buckhead Council of Neighborhoods on September 10, 2020. All tree data in this report reflects all trees in Atlanta, not just those in the Buckhead area, because the Arborist Division does not report tree removal data at more detailed geographical level.

Fewer trees were taken down OVERALL during first three months of COVID-19

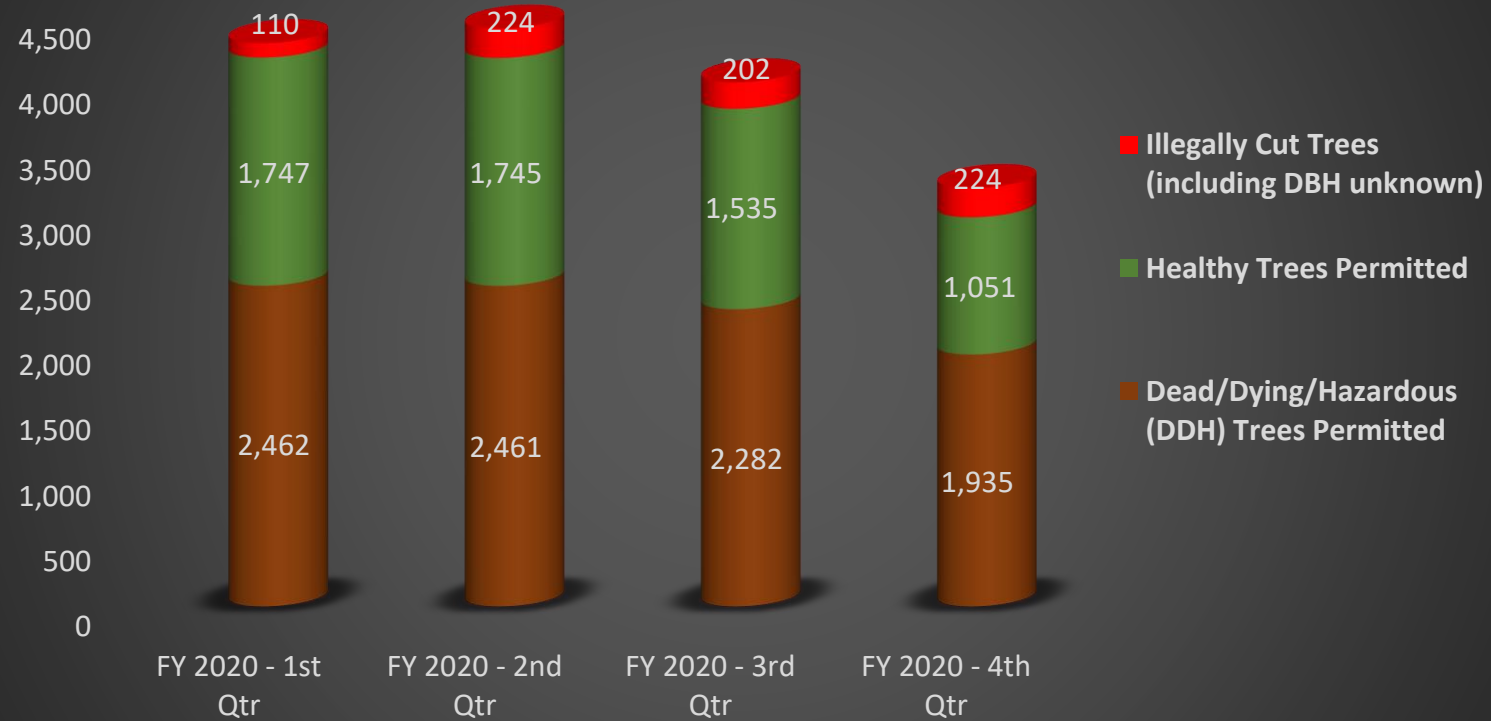


Chart created by The Tree Next Door using quarterly reports provided by the City of Atlanta Department of City Planning. Visit treenextdoor.org for more information.



But... more trees than ever before were removed illegally or as dead, dying or hazardous (DDH)

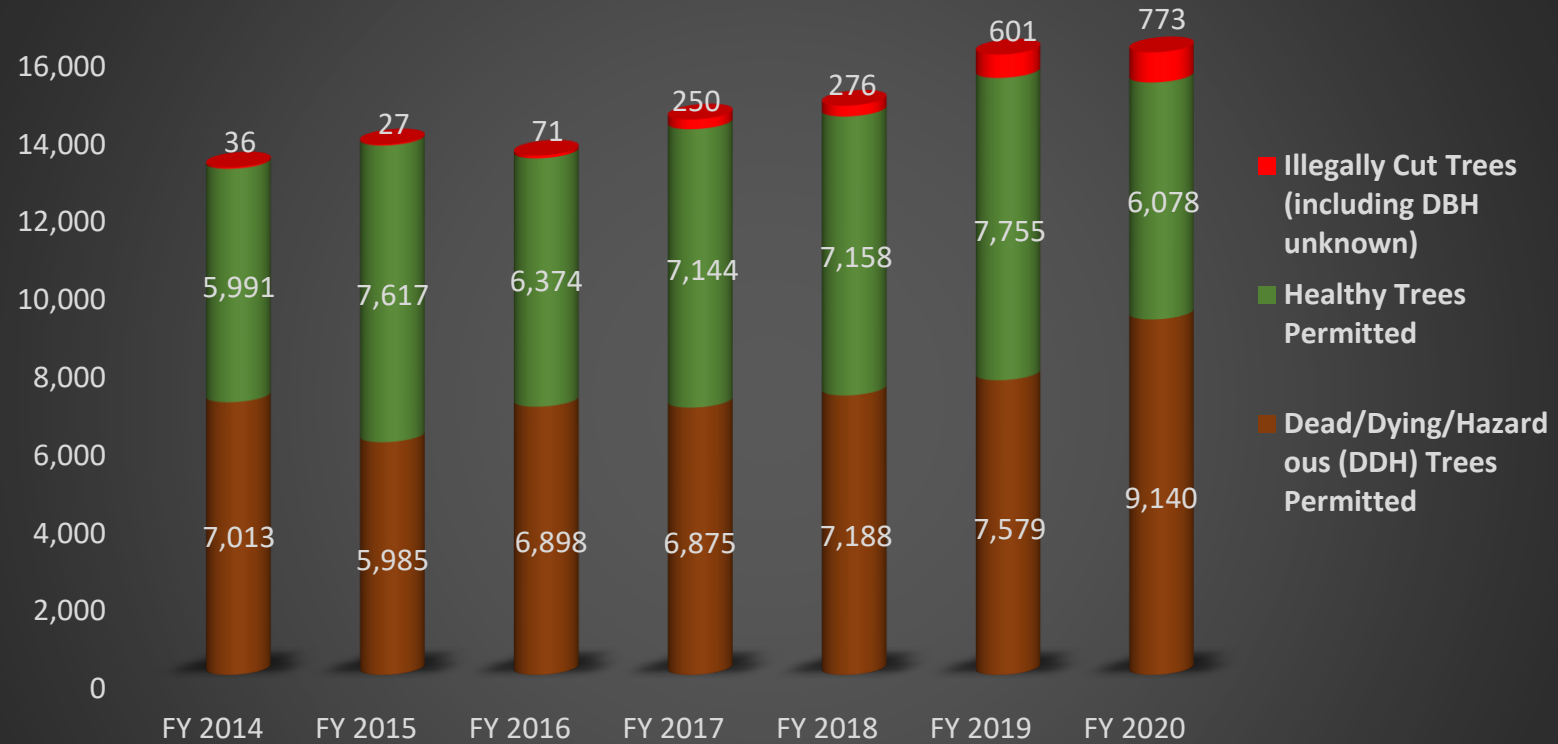


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Almost all DDH permit applications were approved

Less than 2% of DDH tree permit applications were denied during the first three months of COVID-19

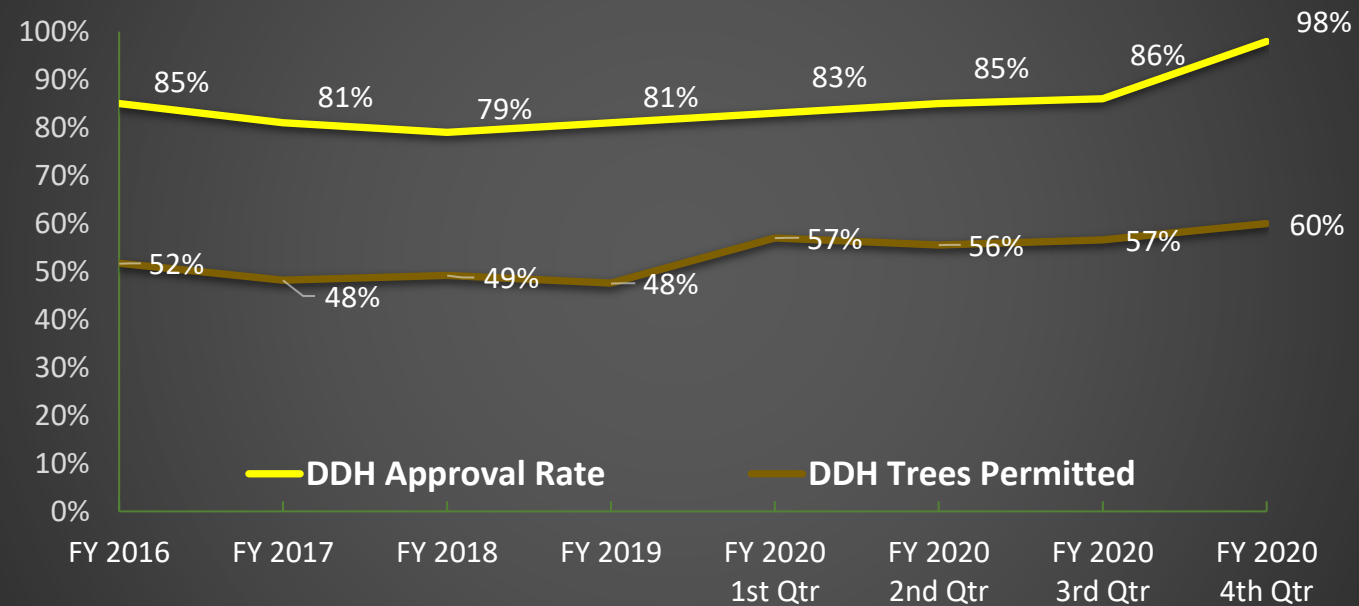


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And illegal tree cutting soared...

FY Year 2020* Quarters

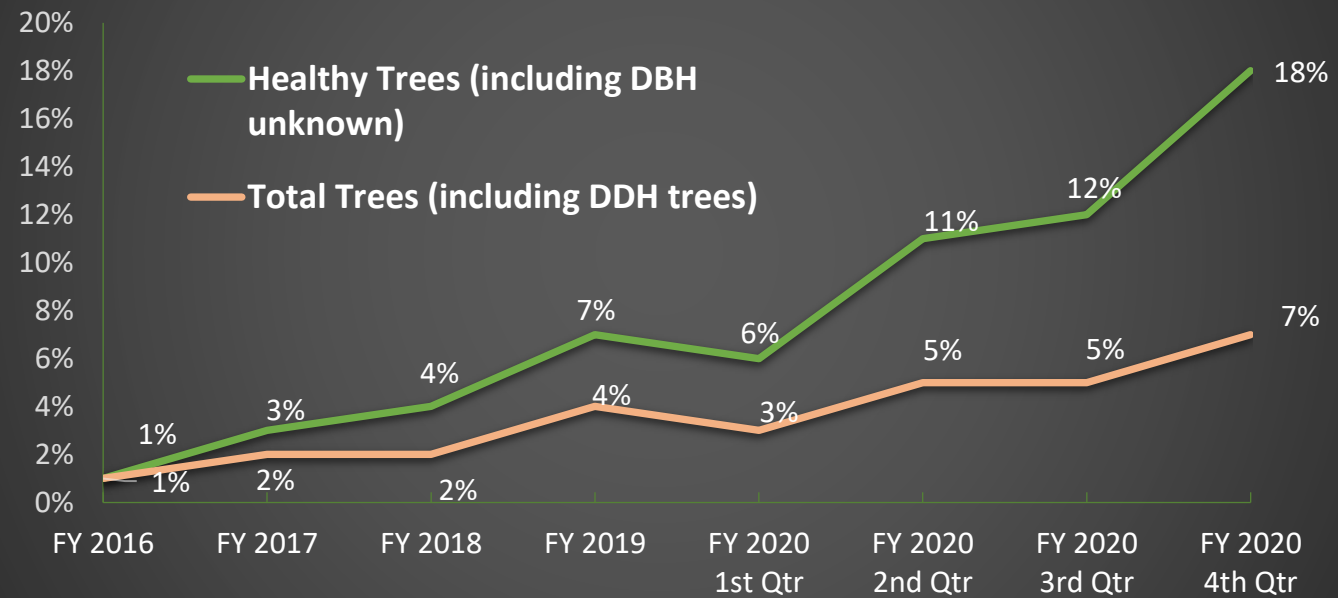


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While tree replanting plummeted...

Net Tree Loss in 4th Qtr: 2,274

% Trees Replaced in 4th Qtr: 30%

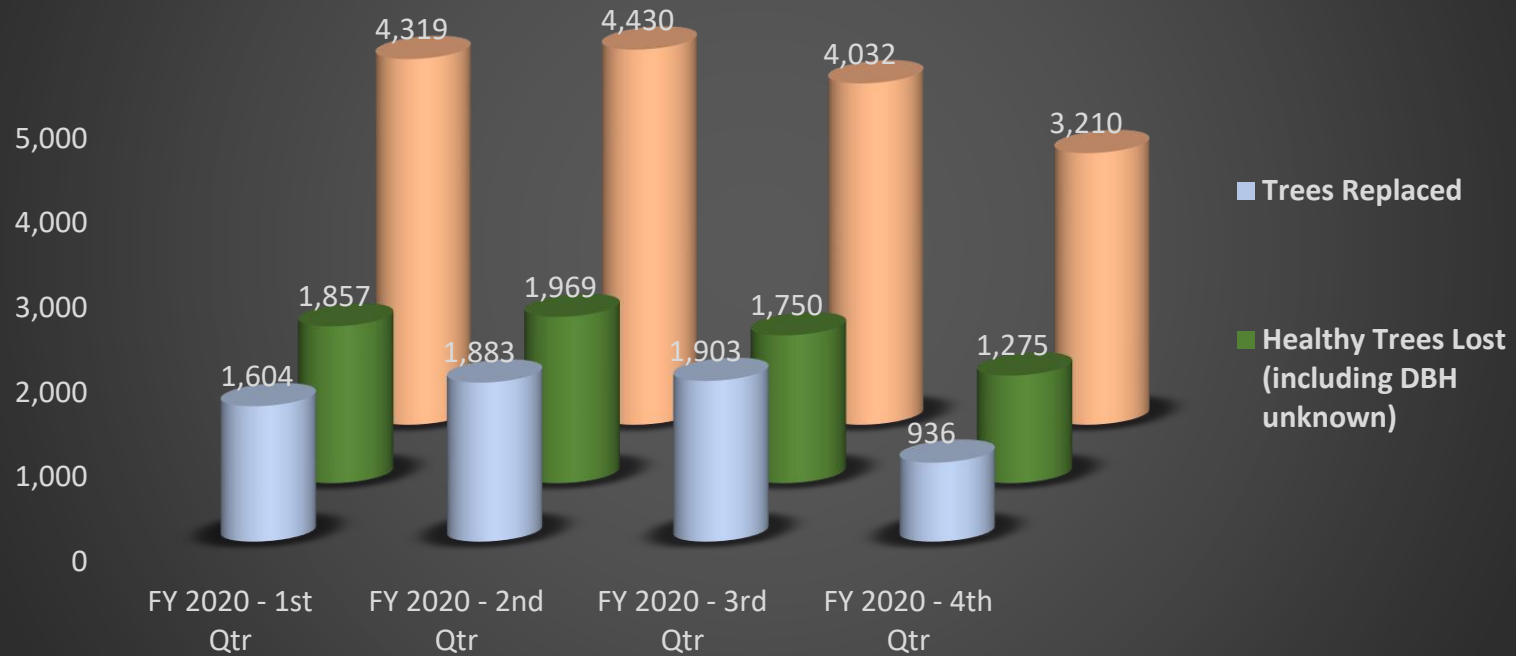



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Why Did This Happen?

Is it still happening? (Probably.)

- Arborist Division says all field arborists “are to work from home to keep employees safe during these unprecedented times.” Which means...
 - DDH inspections being done by photographs alone.
 - Site plans not being verified with an on-site inspection.
 - Developers and other permit applicants do their own postings.
 - One arborist, Peter Stovall, conducting limited inspections when complaints arise – not enough!
- **Park and Recreation Arborists don’t appear to have the same work restrictions.**
 - We are being told that Parks and Recreation “have different guidelines for inspectors to be in the field”.
- **Tree Cutters and Construction Workers have been considered “essential employees” during entire pandemic. Why not Field Arborists?**
- **Inspecting trees outdoors, particularly on unoccupied sites, is extremely “low risk”.**

A dark, irregular ink blot with splatters on a white background. The blot is roughly circular with jagged edges and contains several smaller, lighter-colored splatters and droplets around its perimeter. The text is centered within the dark area.

Meanwhile, the Tree
Ordinance is being
rewritten...

“Must Haves” in a new Tree Ordinance

1. A simplified ordinance.

1. Has a measurable goal to save tree canopy.
2. Cannot be abused or gamed by having too many exceptions or caveats.
3. No special exemptions for city-approved projects.
4. No reduction -- but instead improvement -- in protection for trees than what is in current ordinance.

2. Preservation of “priority trees”.

1. Provision for a pre-application conference in which identification, preservation, and potential removal of priority trees is discussed in context of possible alternative development plans to save more priority trees.
2. No developer incentives or credits shall result in less recompense being paid or greater removal of trees than is necessary for reasonable development of property.

3. Improved posting, transparency, and public electronic access.

1. Timely public notification of all tree removal permit applications and/or preliminary approvals -- including trees claimed to be dead, dying, hazardous, and invasive -- both on the City website and a physical sign on the property.
2. Public electronic access to all tree permitting documentation prior to preliminary or final decisions.
3. Appeal rights for aggrieved applicants, citizens, and alleged violators regarding City Arborist decisions.
4. Reasonable time to appeal for all should increase from 5 business days to 15 calendar days.
5. Timely quarterly reports published on tree removals and the Tree Trust Fund.

4. Enhanced enforcement.

1. Reasonable administrative/civil penalties (like in stormwater ordinance) in addition to the current \$500-\$1,000 misdemeanor fines.
2. Assessing a penalty per inch of tree trunk destroyed in addition to recompense fee
3. Potential to ban egregious violators from future permit activity for reasonable period.

5. Focus on replenishing tree canopy.

2. Use Tree Trust Funds primarily to replant trees.
3. Avoid whittling away tree replacement funds on maintaining existing canopy, acquiring forested land, or funding departmental expenses.

“Also to Include” in a new Tree Ordinance

1. All setback trees clearly protected.

1. Current exceptions allowed (i.e., ingress/egress & utilities)
2. Low value trees in setbacks may be cut to save high value trees in buildable area only when adjacent property owner(s) agree, and no water runoff issues exist.

2. Tree stormwater benefits recognized.

1. No trees may be cut to install water detention devices
2. No trees may be removed from stream buffers.

What You Can Do?

- **To get field arborists back in the field:**
 - Contact Commissioner Tim Keane, Arborist Division Manager David Zapanick, and City Council members asking them to help get field arborists back in the field, especially on unoccupied sites with no risk of human contact.
- **To ensure a better Tree Ordinance:**
 - Support a letter from the Tree Canopy Committee to the City and City Council requesting the Tree Ordinance “must haves”.
 - Be prepared to write letters and make telephone calls when next draft is released in early October.
 - Be aware that public participation is restricted during COVID and respond accordingly.

A Cool New App!

Text TREES to
(404) 637-0080...

And you will get a return of all arborist records for past 2 weeks on properties within a ½ mile of your house, including:

- DDH Permits Requests
- Construction Plan Reviews
- Complaints
- Illegal Activity
- Appeals



For More Information

- **Visit treenextdoor.org**
- **Contact deLille Anthony at deLille@treenextdoor.org**