

CHECKLIST · ATHENS

Moving to Athens: a Checklist for the First 90 Days

What to do, in what order, by when and at which address. Print it and tick it off.

SHORT ANSWER

If you are subject to address reporting, report your new address to USCIS in the first 10 days. Before you sign a lease, ask two questions: is the address inside the Urban Service District (which makes trash service compulsory and puts the charge on the water bill), and which zoning district is the house in. In week one set up power, water and school; the buses are free. Within 30 days get the license, but **the licensing office is now in Bogart and no bus goes there.**

The first 10 days

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ Report your address to USCIS (AR-11)	As a general rule this is required of most people who are not U.S. citizens, green card holders included; A and G visa holders and Visa Waiver visitors are outside it. Türkiye is not in the Visa Waiver Program, so that exception does not cover visitors from Türkiye. Moving from one street to another inside Athens counts too, and the 10-day clock restarts with every move. uscis.gov/addresschange
☐ Form EOIR-33 if you have a court case	Within 5 days, to the court that holds your case. There are two separate immigration courts in Atlanta, in different buildings: respondentaccess.eoir.justice.gov
☐ If you have a reporting duty to ICE	Report the address to ICE as well: portal.ice.gov
☐ Change of address at the post office	A USPS change does not update USCIS records, and USPS does not forward USCIS mail to a new address. They are two separate errands.
☐ If your address reads Winterville or Bogart	You are inside Clarke County but in one of the two small cities that stayed outside the unified government. That changes which city hall handles your municipal business; it does not change the USCIS filing. Report the address exactly as it appears on your bill and do not try to correct the city name yourself.

TWO QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SIGN A LEASE

- **1. Is the address inside the Urban Service District?** The unified government collects trash only inside the USD, which is the old Athens city limits from before consolidation. There the service is **compulsory** and the charge appears on your **water bill**. Inside the **General Service District** the service is not required and the household hires a private company. Two neighbors on opposite sides of an invisible 1990 line get a different answer, and your bill, your budget and your weekly routine all change with it.
- **2. Which zoning district is the house in?** Ordinance 9-15-18 says that in any single-family residential (RS) district and in AR neighborhoods no more than **two unrelated individuals** may reside in one dwelling unit, and a **family may have no more than one** unrelated individual living with it. **"Family" stops at the second degree** of relation: husbands and wives, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces, and first cousins. A more distant relative falls outside the definition. **"Residing" means** staying overnight **more than 30 days** in any 90-day period, so a relative who stays a month and a bit counts toward the limit. The rule bites only in RS and AR zones, and the Planning Department tells you which zone you are in: **706-613-3515** (120 West Dougherty Street). Nothing in the ordinance turns on immigration status; it is a zoning matter.
- **Deposit and rent:** a deposit cannot exceed two months' rent on leases entered into or renewed on or after July 1, 2024, and it is returned within 30 days. There is no cap on rent increases, and rent control is banned by state law. The federal tables put fair market rent in the Athens area at \$1,159 for a studio, \$1,183 for one bedroom, \$1,331 for two, \$1,734 for three and \$1,831 for four. Photograph every room on move-in day and email the photos with the date: no government agency in Georgia can intervene in a landlord and tenant dispute, and the route is the county's magistrate court.

The first week

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ Electricity: find the company first	Depending on the address it is Georgia Power (888-655-5888), Jackson EMC (706-548-5362) or Walton EMC (770-267-2505), and the unified government says on its own page that its staff do not know which utility covers a given address. With no SSN, the route with written proof is Georgia Power's PrePay plan: its page asks for "a Social Security Number (SSN) or a photo ID" plus proof of address, with no credit check, and the start-up cost is \$40 of funding plus a \$30 fee; enrollment on 1-877-506-3905. We could not read the two cooperatives' identification and deposit rules , so call and ask. A dark streetlight belongs to the power company, not to the government.
☐ Natural gas	This territory sits in the Atlanta Gas Light area: AGL owns the pipes and delivers the gas, and you choose the marketer who sells it. A residential marketer deposit cannot exceed \$150 . AGL is on 800-427-5463. If you smell gas, leave the house first and call from outside.
☐ Water and sewer	The Water Business Office, 124 East Hancock Avenue , 706-613-3500. The lobby is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wednesday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Emergencies and after hours 706-613-3481. Two things are asked: a government photo ID and a complete signed lease . A connection needs up to three business days of lead time; same-day service is in person only and costs \$25 more. July 1 to August 15 is the declared peak move-in season and applications slow down.

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ Trash (if you are inside the USD)	The same office takes the application and the charge appears on the water bill. Start-up is a \$30 deposit plus a \$25 service fee . Carts go to the street by 7:30 a.m. on collection day, trash bagged and recycling loose; loose trash is not collected, and each extra bag needs a \$3 prepaid sticker . Report a missed collection on 706-613-3501, option 5. Recycling is included at no extra cost.
☐ Enroll the children in school	Clarke County School District. Registration is online and an appointment is needed for help: 595 Prince Avenue, 706-546-7721. Two proofs of address dated within 30 days are required. The Social Security card is on the published list, but the statewide rule does not allow a child to be refused for want of a number; ask for the written objection in writing.
☐ Library card	Athens-Clarke County Library, 2025 Baxter Street, 706-613-3650. The card is free to anyone who lives, attends school, owns property or is employed in Georgia , and immigration status is not asked. The digital card is entirely online and needs no document at all . For a newcomer without a license it is the easiest document to obtain.
☐ No 311: note the numbers	There is no single number in Athens. Water or sewer emergency 706-613-3495 on weekdays and 706-613-3481 after hours; water bills 706-613-3500; police non-emergency 706-613-3345; traffic signals 706-613-3460; animal services 706-613-3540; missed collection 706-613-3501. Everything else goes to the Communications Department on 706-613-3795 or info@accgov.com.
☐ Apply for an SSN (if you are eligible)	Start online and visit an SSA office by appointment; it is free: ssa.gov . National line 1-800-772-1213. SSA names an Athens office in its Georgia list, but we could not verify the street address this round , so get the address and the appointment requirement from ssa.gov/locator or by phone.

TWO OFFICIAL CONTRADICTIONS ON THE WATER APPLICATION

- **The deposit appears as two different amounts.** The starting-service page says **\$75 deposit plus a \$20 service fee**; the FAQ on the same site still says **\$50 deposit plus a \$10 fee**. We do not pick between them: budget roughly **\$95** and confirm the exact figure at the counter.
- **The ID list names only U.S. passports.** The accepted documents listed are a driver's license, a state identification card, a **U.S. passport, a U.S. passport card and a U.S. military ID**. No foreign passport and no consular ID appears. And the odd part: the same government's identification list for a short-term rental permit says "passport" and "green card" with no "U.S." in front. So **we cannot promise that a Turkish passport will open a water account**. Call **706-613-3500** before you travel to the office and ask what they take, or apply after you have your Georgia license. The good news: nothing on the application page mentions a Social Security number, an ITIN or a credit report.

Getting around: no fare, but no route out of the county either

- **There is no fare table because there is nothing to print.** The unified government's own page says ACC Transit is fare free to all riders and states that the decision covers **the Lift paratransit service too**. There is no ticket, no day pass, no monthly pass and no transfer charge. We give no start date because the date repeated in news coverage appears on no official page. The policy is a decision of the elected Commission rather than a statute.

- **Hours and routes:** weekdays 6 a.m. to 9:45 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 7 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. Eighteen routes during the day and nine on evenings and weekends. **Routes 23 and 28 are suspended.** During university breaks routes 12 and 14 run reduced schedules. Live tracking is in the myStop app and bus information is on **706-613-3430**; the administrative offices are at 775 East Broad Street.
- **The Lift:** curb to curb between addresses within one mile of a fixed route, at no fare. Weekdays 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., weekends 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Reservations 706-613-3435, weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., up to 14 days ahead, and a trip must be booked at least one day ahead and before 5 p.m. The application needs a doctor's signature; to apply by phone call 706-613-3434.
- **A second free network:** UGA Campus Transit describes its buses on its own page as fare free and open to the public, naming "the greater Athens community" among the people it serves. A resident who is not a student may ride. Information on 706-369-6221.
- **Leaving the county:** there is no Amtrak station and the city bus stops at the county line. To Atlanta, FlixBus runs four departures a day (first 6:10 a.m., last 10:20 p.m., 72 miles, about 1 hour 25 minutes) from 775 East Broad Street, with Atlanta stops beside the Garnett and Civic Center rail stations. To the airport, Groome Transportation runs a shared van around the clock with departures roughly every hour; the ride takes 2 to 2.5 hours and a one-way adult fare starts at \$55 with the online discount and \$65 otherwise, plus a \$2 per-passenger fuel surcharge. Phone (706) 612-1155.
- **You cannot buy an airline ticket at the local airport:** Athens-Ben Epps Airport has no scheduled passenger service. Your flight leaves from Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson, about **79 miles** and an hour and three quarters by car (our own computation, not an official figure).

Within 30 days

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ The Georgia license: the office is now outside the county	The center closed on October 3, 2026 and the replacement opened on October 6, 2026 in Oconee County: 1627 McNutt Creek Road, Bogart GA 30622, Tuesday to Friday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. An appointment is for the road test only. The county buses do not go there , and Bogart is about 7 miles west of downtown. Call (678) 413-8400 before you travel. The knowledge exam can be taken in Turkish and the road test is in English. An SSN or form DDS-351, documents in English, no translations accepted, the card printed LIMITED-TERM, an eight-year license \$32.
☐ Car registration (the tag office)	License first, then registration. Clarke County Tax Commissioner, Motor Vehicle Office, 3025 Lexington Road , lobby weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 706-613-3130 , no appointment system. A title is \$18 and the plate \$20 a year. Bring form MV-1, the original out-of-state title, form T-17 if the car is financed or leased, and proof of Georgia liability insurance.
☐ The 3 percent title tax	The rate is 7 percent of fair market value, but someone who has just moved to the state and brought the car along pays 3 percent. On a \$25,000 car that is a \$1,000 difference. Say at the tag office that you are a new resident and bring something that shows your move date.
☐ Insurance and emissions	The minimums are \$25,000 / \$50,000 / \$25,000. Clarke County sits outside the emissions testing area , so there is no annual test; we could not re-read that county list this round, so confirm on 1-800-449-2471 before you register.

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ No Peach Pass needed	There is no toll road in or near Athens. If you commute to Atlanta an account makes sense: the transponder is free and a personal account needs a \$20 prepaid balance; driving the lanes without a tag adds a \$25 administrative fee per trip.
☐ The October 12, 2026 trap	That day the buses run a full service but the tax and tag offices are closed . The other closures are November 11, November 26 and 27, December 24 and 25, 2026 and January 1, 2027.

Water, sewer and trash: what you will pay each month

ITEM	RATE
Water, tier 1 (up to the annual average)	\$7.02 per 1,000 gallons
Water, upper tiers	Up to 50 percent over the average \$8.79; 51 to 99 percent over \$10.54; more than 100 percent over \$17.58
Sewer	100 percent of water consumption at \$8.63 per 1,000 gallons
Fixed monthly charges	Water customer service fee \$4.95, sewer customer service fee \$4.95, meter replacement \$0.54
Trash inside the USD, by cart size	A 20-gallon cart \$25.41; 32-gallon \$28.88; 64-gallon \$35.52; 96-gallon \$46.20; two 96-gallon carts \$86.63. Premium backyard service adds \$34.65 a month and the vacant rate is \$20.90
A warning for larger families	A brand-new account's annual average is set on the assumption of a two-person household using 50 gallons per person a day , with a minimum average of 3,000 gallons a month. A family of five will be billed into the upper tiers in its first months unless the figure is adjusted: in your first week file a water service request and affidavit at the Water Business Office and ask for an adjustment

Within 90 days and after

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ Without insurance: one clinic really is free	Mercy Health Center says on its own frequently asked questions page that its services are free: 700 Oglethorpe Avenue Suite C7, 706-425-9445 , Monday to Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Friday 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., with hours extending to 8 p.m. on some Tuesday and Thursday evenings. All four conditions must be true: 18 or older, completely uninsured, family income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and residence in one of the 13 counties the clinic names (Clarke is on the list). Its published rules say nothing about immigration status. Free routes 5, 7 and 21 stop at the corner of Hawthorne and Oglethorpe.

TASK	WHERE AND HOW
☐ The options that are not free	MedLink Athens says in its own words that it is not a free clinic, and the minimum fee for a medical office visit is \$40: 2000 Prince Avenue, 706-352-9705. Athens Neighborhood Health Center works on a sliding fee scale: 675 College Avenue (706) 546-5526 and 402 McKinley Drive (706) 543-1145. A sliding scale does not mean free; a bill still comes, scaled to your income. The university health center is open only to registered students and their spouses or partners , so a resident who is not a student cannot use it.
☐ Financial assistance on a hospital bill	St. Mary's Hospital (1230 Baxter Street, 706-389-3000) gives uninsured patients at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level a 100 percent discount on the charges, with a discount between 200 and 400 percent. Assistance is for residents of the 16 counties the policy names, and Athens-Clarke is on that list. Financial counselors (844) 853-7359. There is no Turkish version. The application carries a status question with an explicit option to decline to answer, and the SSN field is marked optional; before you fill the form in, you may want to talk the question over with an immigration attorney.
☐ Buying insurance	Georgia did not adopt the adult Medicaid expansion. The state runs its own marketplace, Georgia Access : the 2027 enrollment period opens on November 1, 2026, December 15, 2026 is the last day for coverage starting January 1, 2027, and the period closes on January 15, 2027. The consumer line is 888-687-1503. Moving to the United States from abroad opens a special enrollment period.
☐ Income tax and the ITIN	Athens-Clarke County has no local income tax. Georgia's flat state rate is 4.99 percent for tax year 2026, with a standard deduction of \$15,000 single and \$30,000 married filing jointly. The state return is Form 500, due with the federal return on April 15. There is no IRS office in Athens; the nearest one that reviews ITIN documents in person is in Gainesville, about 39 miles away, and it is closer than Atlanta. Appointments on 844-545-5640.
☐ Property tax and the homestead exemption	The 2026 bills were mailed on August 20, 2026 and were due October 20, 2026. Unlike Atlanta with its two separate due dates, Athens has one, because it has one government. Tax is charged on the assessed value, 40 percent of fair market value; the local homestead exemption is \$25,000 off the county portion and \$10,000 off the school portion. The deadline is April 1 and the application goes to 325 East Washington Street, Suite 250, 706-613-3120. You have 45 days from the notice of assessment to appeal. We could not confirm whether the office asks for a valid Georgia ID, so get the license done early.
☐ Türkiye-related errands	Georgia is served by the Turkish Consulate General in Miami, and from Athens it is the longest trip in this series: about 677 road miles and roughly 12 hours 45 minutes each way, by our own computation. In-person applications are taken weekdays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. only, so it cannot be done in a day. An apostille comes not from the Secretary of State but from the GSCCCA in Atlanta, at \$3 per document.

ARREST AND JAIL: WHAT GEORGIA LAW SAYS

- **The duty sits with the Sheriff.** The unified government has its own police department (3035 Lexington Road, 706-613-3330), but the jail is run by the **Clarke County Sheriff**: Clarke County Sheriff Office Jail, 3015 Lexington Road, Athens GA 30605, 706-613-3270. The Sheriff's office is at 325 East Washington Street, 706-613-3250. The chain runs like this: the police make the arrest, the person is booked into the Sheriff's jail, and the duties the law places on the custodial authority become the Sheriff's duties.
- **The 48-hour rule.** When a person is confined in a county or municipal jail **for any period, however short**, a reasonable effort must be made within 48 hours to determine their nationality and whether they are lawfully present (O.C.G.A. 42-4-14). If lawful status cannot be verified from the documents the person is carrying, verification is made by a query to the Law Enforcement Support Center at the Department of Homeland Security.
- **The documents the statute lists:** a state driver's license or identification card from the approved list, a **Form I-94**, a **permanent resident card (Form I-551)**, a valid Nexus card, a valid Global Entry card, or a valid passport showing that the person is a U.S. citizen, has been issued a visa, or is a citizen of a visa waiver country.
- **The detail Turkish citizens should read closely:** Türkiye is not in the Visa Waiver Program. The passport item on that list therefore covers a Turkish passport only **together with a visa record**. Keep the document that shows your status reachable: your I-94 record, your green card or your visa.
- **The Sheriff's own published figures.** The Clarke County Sheriff's Office publishes its quarterly reports on the unified government's website. July to September 2026: 1,632 people booked into the jail, 77 inquiries, 77 responses, 48 responses of foreign-born, 13 detainees (signed October 1, 2026). April to June 2026: 1,599 booked, 60 inquiries, 60 responses, 43 responses of foreign-born, 15 detainees (signed July 1, 2026). These are the Sheriff's own official figures; we compute no rates or percentages, because the reports give none.
- **What the law does not do:** it does not make Athens police ICE officers, it does not require officers to stop anyone to ask about status, and it does not put an enforcement duty on schools, libraries or hospitals. Verification is tied to arrests, jail intake and investigations. Where a detainer notice exists, O.C.G.A. 42-1-11.5 also requires that the person be told they are being held under it, and the statute frames the confinement as being in compliance with Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations: if you are a Turkish citizen you can ask that the consulate be notified.

Figures this guide deliberately leaves out

There are three gaps and here is why. First, **we print no millage rate**: the unified government documents carrying the 2026 rates would not open for us, and the school rate, which the Clarke County Board of Education sets separately, we could not obtain at all, so printing a total would have meant printing an incomplete one. To understand your bill, use the Tax Commissioner's "Tax Bill Insert - 2026" guide or call 706-613-3120. Second, **we print no census figures for Clarke County, such as median household income or the poverty rate**: the official source could not be read, and in a university town tens of thousands of students are counted as county residents, which makes those numbers a poor description of the families who live here. Third, **there is no bus fare table**, because the system is fare free. We also could not read the combined sales tax rate for Clarke County from an official source, so we print no percentage.

IF YOU ARE NOT A CITIZEN, REMEMBER

- Do not check an "I am a U.S. citizen" box on any form and do not register to vote. The DDS license application contains a voter registration section; if you are not a citizen, do not sign it and check the Opt-Out box. Do not fill in voter registration forms at the tables set up on campus and downtown.
- **A jury summons can arrive** and ignoring it is not an option: Georgia builds its statewide jury list from DDS license and ID records plus the voter list, so a lawfully present noncitizen with a Georgia license can be summoned without ever registering to vote. The Athens clerk publishes a ready-made form for exactly this: the excusal affidavit carries a box reading **"I am not a citizen of the United States"**, and that box sits in the part of the form that **does not need a notary**. The affidavit must reach the clerk **at least 5 days before** your service date: jury@accgov.com or the Jury Clerk on (762) 400-6463.
- Before applying for SNAP, Medicaid, PeachCare, Pathways, energy assistance or any other public benefit, speak with an immigration attorney: the new public charge rule has been in force since September 18, 2026. Energy assistance also requires lawful status and a Social Security number for every member of the household, with no ITIN alternative.
- If a green card application is pending, do not leave the country without advance parole. Check your I-94 record at i94.cbp.dhs.gov: a Georgia license is printed LIMITED-TERM and its expiry follows the date on the I-94.
- A business license requires you to swear before a notary that you are lawfully present, and that is not a work permit. Being able to sign the affidavit does not mean you may work in the business.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN ATHENS

Have a question about your immigration status?

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