

CHECKLIST · HUNTSVILLE

Moving to Huntsville Checklist: The First 30 Days (2026)

One question opens the whole list: which county is your address in? Write the answer down, it comes back at you in six separate items.

SHORT ANSWER

This list starts with one task and nothing else comes before it in this city: **look up your address**. Huntsville is **one city spread across three counties**; on a calculation from the Census Bureau's boundary data the weight is **clearly on the Madison side**, the Limestone side is small but real, and the Morgan side is a very small piece. **The postal address on your envelope does not tell you your county**. Write the answer down, because **it comes back at you again and again**: the sales and grocery tax rate, the annual value tax on your car, the plate and registration counter, the property tax office and the exemption filing, which court a jury summons comes from, and which emergency management agency you follow in severe weather. There is good news too, and it is rare in this series: **power, natural gas and water come from the same municipal utility on one bill**, and **the identification it accepts is written down**.

Day one: look up your address

The most useful link in this guide is an address lookup, and there are three tools; all three belong to the institutions themselves.

TOOL	WHAT IT RETURNS
The Census Bureau's address lookup service	Returns an address's county, municipality and school district in a single query and asks for no registration and no key . It was tested first hand in this research and the three-county structure was measured with it
The state revenue department's address lookup	Returns the state, county and city tax rates that apply at that address, which closes the county question on the money side
The city's own address tool	Returns your council member, school zone and trash collection day together. One warning : the city's map server was closed to the outside in this research, so we link the tool but we could not test its contents

Where the answer comes back at you

ITEM	DOES IT CHANGE BY COUNTY
Sales and grocery tax rate	It changes. The gap between two sides reaches a point and a half , and which rate applies to the city's Morgan portion did not come out of the department's file
Annual value tax on a vehicle	It changes , because one multiplier in the calculation is the county rate
Property tax office and exemption filing	It changes. The filing goes to the county , not the state
Vehicle registration and plate counter	It changes. Three separate counters, one inside the city and two outside
Emergency management agency and shelter list	It changes , and it is the most critical distinction on this list
Probate court and recording the marriage certificate	It changes, but the choice is yours: the form can be recorded in any county
Which court a jury summons comes from	It can change , because the county courts are separate
School district	It does not change. The test is not the county but the city limits
Power, natural gas and water	They do not change. All three come from the same municipal utility on one bill
Driver license office	It does not change. The state office is inside the city
City code enforcement, zoning, city licensing and the reporting channel	They do not change. All of them sit with the city itself
Weather forecast office	It does not change. All three counties fall under the same regional office, and this was measured
Vital records	They do not change. The register is statewide and single

Looking at the list, the pattern is this: in this city **money and disaster** change with the county, while **services and documents** do not. There is one more layer: in this state **municipalities can also exercise tax and licensing authority in a belt beyond their limits**; in the revenue department's file the rate for that belt shows as **zero** for this city. **That does not mean the city has no authority in the belt**, and **the statutory basis for that authority could not be read in this research.**

The first thirty days

TASK	WHERE OR HOW
☐ Run the address lookup and write down your county	geocoding.geo.census.gov . Your neighbor's answer may not be your answer

TASK	WHERE OR HOW
☐ File the federal address report within 10 days	uscis.gov/addresschange ; enter the receipt number of every pending application. If you have a case in immigration court, also file Form EOIR-33/IC within 5 days
☐ Do not be fooled by the city name on your envelope staying the same	In this state an address can be written on the postal side under the name of another place. What triggers the obligation is not the envelope, it is the move itself. Even moving within the city can change your county
☐ Open the utility account with one application	Power, natural gas and water come from the same utility on one bill. The outage line is shared by all three: 256-535-4448 , main number 256-535-1200
☐ Prepare your identification against the list	A passport and a consular ID are on the primary list , the ITIN is on the secondary list. See the box below
☐ Do not apply online if you need service within two business days	That warning is written on the utility's own page; apply in person or through your apartment management
☐ Get a library card	The resident card is free , a passport is accepted , and no card type asks for a Social Security number . There is a separate free computer use card for someone with no photo identification
☐ Book the license appointment at the state office	Not one county counter processes foreign nationals; the measurement came out the same in all three counties
☐ Register your vehicle within thirty days	Your counter depends on your county and there are three addresses . The annual value tax is collected before the plate is issued
☐ If you have children, call the school district	The test is the city limits ; if you are staying with a relative, a home visit is required , so say so up front
☐ Ask your employer whether there is a local payroll deduction	A payroll occupational tax does not appear on the city's own list of taxes it collects, but that is not a statement that none exists. The test is not residence but where the work is performed
☐ Keep the automatic emergency alerts on your phone turned on	No signup is needed , they go automatically to compatible phones, and in a tornado this is the main channel
☐ Sign up for the city's address-based notification system too	When you give your address it sends alerts by location ; in a three-county city that is a real advantage
☐ Decide where you will shelter before a storm comes	There are no public safe rooms in this city ; the plan has to be built inside the building . If you rent, ask about the building's designated sheltering area before you sign
☐ If you bought a home, put the exemption calendar in your diary	October 1, October 1 to December 31 and December 31 . The filing goes to your own county's revenue office

THE UTILITY ACCOUNT: THE INSTITUTION'S OWN LIST, AND ITS PRICE

In this city **power, natural gas and water come from a single municipal utility**. From the utility's residential service terms page: unless you apply with the state's marked identification card, opening service requires **two valid, unexpired government issued forms of identification**, and **at least one must come from the primary list**.

PRIMARY LIST (AT LEAST ONE)	SECONDARY LIST
The state's marked identification card (sufficient on its own)	Social Security card
Driver license, non-driver identification card, military identification card	Certified copy of a birth certificate, voter registration
Photo weapons permit, pilot license issued by the aviation administration	Health program card, annual wage statement
A consular identification card issued by another national government, or similar identification	Individual taxpayer identification number
Passport	Selective service card, naturalization certificate, employer identification card

- **Three conclusions for the reader. A Turkish passport is on the primary list** and stands on its own as the first form of identification; **a consular identification card is also on the primary list** and the utility describes it expressly as **issued by another national government**; **the Social Security card appears only on the secondary list**, and the **individual taxpayer identification number** is named on that same list in its place. **A list written this plainly is rare in this series.**
- **Your right to refuse the credit check is written into the policy.** If you refuse, a deposit is required, but **the door does not close. The deposit cannot exceed twice the average bill** (past or projected), and a customer with **at least 12 months** of satisfactory payment history becomes eligible for **a reduced or fully refunded** deposit.
- **Two limits:** the account is opened in the name of the **owner, legal tenant or legal representative**; and **if a customer with an unpaid balance lives in the same home**, the utility will not accept someone else paying a deposit and opening service in their place. **Ask up front whether the home you are moving into carries a past balance.**
- **And the price is in the same box:** the state regulator names on its own consumer page the things it does not regulate, and **municipal utilities are on that list**. It finishes the sentence this way: **therefore it does not have power to resolve complaints concerning them**. So **you have no state level complaint body here. The distinction is not between cities but between types of organization**, and you can recognize it on your own bill: **if your provider is a regulated private company there is a state route, if it is a municipal utility or a cooperative there is not.**
- **Who the counterparty is:** the utility's own **account review procedure**. You have **at least four business days** to dispute a bill; service can be reconnected **temporarily** while the dispute runs, but only if you **accept the written terms** and **pay the amounts you are not disputing**. **The second counterparty is political:** the utility is a public entity owned by the city, so the elected council sits in that chain.

The shutoff rule: two separate rules, and which one protects you

- **The first rule belongs to the state regulator and it does not apply here.** That rule bars disconnecting residential **electric or natural gas** service for non-payment when the forecast for that calendar day at that address is **32 degrees Fahrenheit or below**. It has four limits: **its scope is electricity and natural gas only** (water, sewer and trash are outside), **no heat trigger was found**, **the source document carries a very old effective date** and whether it has since been amended could not be verified, and most important, **it binds regulated utilities only**. **The utility in this city is not regulated**, so we do not present that rule to you as a right.
- **The second rule is the utility's own policy and this is the one that applies to you:** customers are not disconnected for non-payment during extreme temperatures. The test is the National Weather Service forecasting **below 32 degrees or over 100 degrees Fahrenheit**. In those conditions a **representative visits** customers whose service is set to be terminated, and service **is not terminated until weather conditions improve**. **Its scope is broad:** the policy is written for the utility's **electric, water and gas** service alike.
- **We write its four limits too: if service is already off, weather does not bring it back; when the reprieve ends the disconnection resumes with no further notice; the representative's visit is added to your next bill as a charge; and the source of the rule is not state law but the utility's own internal policy**, so no outside body compels it.

Severe weather: two seasons, and no public shelter

- **There are two separate seasons and a newcomer does not know the second one.** The regional weather office's text describes the primary season as **spring** (March to May) and the second as running **from early November to mid December**. **A family that moves in September can walk into November unprepared.**
- **The moment to go to a shelter is the watch, not the warning.** A Tornado Watch means conditions are favorable and **that is the moment to go to a public shelter**; at a Tornado Warning the agency's own language is that **traveling at that point is dangerous**.
- **There are no public safe rooms in this city and we do not soften it.** The joint city and county emergency management agency's own sentence: *"The larger cities of Huntsville and Madison do not have public safe rooms."* The same passage adds that **some places of worship and other buildings** may announce they are open as a public shelter during severe weather. **This is the agency's own wording**, and it is one of the few items in this series where we can write **none** rather than **we could not find any**.
- **In exchange, the county publishes a detailed shelter list**, with **capacity, accessibility and whether caged pets are accepted** on every record. The only example inside the city limits is **Moore's Mill VFD, 7416 Moore Mill Road, Huntsville, AL 35811 · 256-859-6350, capacity 180**. The full list is on [the agency's own page](#).
- **And a gap:** no equivalent public shelter list was found in this research for readers on the Limestone and Morgan sides. **We do not say there is none**; we say we could not find one, and we tell you **not to build a plan around a shelter we could not find**.
- **The agency's own disclaimer stands as well:** every public shelter is **managed separately by the community it serves**, has its own opening criteria and **may not always be open**.
- **In a manufactured or mobile home the official advice is not to shelter in place but to leave in advance.** The weather service says **mobile homes and tents are not safe**; the joint emergency management agency

says **mobile homes are among the most dangerous places to be in a storm and should be evacuated**, and asks residents of parks without a designated shelter to **make a plan to stay with a friend, neighbor or relative nearby. This is a renting decision. We publish no risk ratio**, because no numerical ratio could be verified from any agency's own page.

- **A correction:** all three of the city's county portions fall under **the same regional weather office**; this was measured. The reason to know your county is different: **warning texts go out under the county name, shelter lists are published by county, and the emergency management agency changes with the county.**

Home and renting: four questions before you sign

- 1 **Which county is this address in, and is it inside the city limits?** Run the lookup yourself, do not rely on the landlord's answer.
 - 2 **Does this building have a designated sheltering area, and where is it?** There are no public safe rooms in this city, and **whether a landlord has any obligation to provide or point out such an area could not be verified**, so you have to ask the question.
 - 3 **Whose name is the utility account in, and is there a past balance at this address?** If a customer with an unpaid balance lives in the same home, the utility will not open service in someone else's name.
 - 4 **Which organization provides sewer service and who is responsible for the service line? That item could not be verified in this research**, so ask for a written answer. Add the flood question as well: **no address-level local flood information page could be read.**
- **Protected classes:** the state's fair housing provision names race, color, religion, sex, familial status and **national origin. Source of income and immigration status are not on that list, and disability is not named in this provision** (housing disability protection comes from **federal housing law**; the two are separate bodies of law). For a Turkish reader the basis that matters is **national origin**.
 - **There is a bar on retaliation, but it is narrow:** it operates in three situations only. A complaint **to a public agency** about a building or housing code violation materially affecting health and safety, a complaint **to the landlord** about a violation of a specific section of the act, and membership in or organization of **a tenants' union. Those three are listed; it is not generalized into tenants are protected.**
 - **The security deposit cap is one month's rent**, with three exceptions. **Sixty days for the refund or an itemized written statement;** a landlord who misses it owes **twice the deposit**, but to claim it you must have left **a written forwarding address** on move out; **a deposit unclaimed for 90 days is treated as forfeited.**
 - **One ground cannot be cured:** a deliberate material misrepresentation in the lease or in **the rental application. Do not sign a form you do not understand.**
 - **The 2011 act's bar on renting to immigrants was permanently enjoined, but the text is still printed in the code** and a reader who searches finds it. The citation is in the school section; if you run into a problem on this, **talk to an attorney.**

Tax and property: two items that come back after the first month

- **This state has an income tax.** If you came from another state, **redo your take-home pay calculation.** Sales and grocery tax **differ between the sides**; the state reduced its grocery share **but the local shares did not come down**, so the rate you see at the register is not the state rate. And a pattern seen for the first time in this series is here: one county carries **two separate entries** in the file, the second applying **only outside the city limits** and set higher, so **that county's share goes down when you cross into the city.**
- **Property tax differs twofold between an owner who lives there and one who rents it out:** an owner occupied single family home is assessed at **10 percent** of market value; vacant land or property **not occupied exclusively by its owner** is assessed at **20 percent.** **The penalty for a false statement is heavy:** the administrative rule makes anyone who knowingly and willfully gives false information liable for **twice the tax** due for up to **ten years back, with 15 percent annual interest.**
- **The increase cap resets when the property changes hands.** For certain classes the annual increase is capped at **7 percent**, the base year is **October 1, 2024** and the rule applies to collections beginning **October 1, 2025**; but the cap does not transfer. **Build your budget on the new valuation, not on the seller's last tax bill.**
- **The answer to the number question is not at the state, it is at the county.** The administrative rule for the exemption was read end to end and **no identification number is mentioned anywhere in it**; but **the county** takes the filing and **no county's published document list could be read.** In Huntsville that is a question to ask **separately for three counties.** **Whether the filing deadline differs at county level was not verified either.**

The one sentence summary of this list: in Huntsville almost every question starts with **looking up your address**; your utility bill and your school run through one door, but **tax, counters and disaster scatter across three counties.**



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN HUNTSVILLE

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