

CHECKLIST · TUSCALOOSA

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

One county, but three other lines run in its place. You pay a point more at the register, and even how many people may live in a house turns on your address.

SHORT ANSWER

The county question has one answer here: the city sits entirely inside **Tuscaloosa County**. **Do not relax, though**, because three other lines run in its place and none of them follows the same path: your address can be **inside the city limits**, in the **city's police jurisdiction**, or in the **unincorporated part of the county**. Let us put the money first, because it is the most-read item on this list: **general sales tax is 10 percent and food and groceries are taxed at 8 percent**. Among the Alabama settlements read in this round, you pay **a point more** at the register here. That same address answer also sets your water rate, your school district, **whether the three-digit city line works for you**, and **how many unrelated people may live in one house**. **The one thing to do on day one is look up your address**.

Day one: look up your address

The most functional link in this guide is an address lookup. There are three tools and all three belong to the agencies themselves:

TOOL	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
The city's own interactive maps	The zoning map shows whether an address is inside the city and which zoning district it falls in. In this city that map answers three questions at once: am I inside the city limits, which zoning district am I in, and how many people may live in this dwelling
The Census Bureau address lookup service	Returns the county, the municipality and the school district of an address in a single query, and asks for no registration and no key
The state revenue department's address lookup	Gives the state, county and city rates that apply to that address; it closes the city-limit question from the money side

An access note: some of the county's official domains did not connect at all in this research; **the county's working domain is tuscco.com**. Look for county pages there, including the license department and the probate office; if an address you tried did not connect, do not assume the office is closed.

Where that answer comes back at you

ITEM	DOES IT CHANGE WITH YOUR ADDRESS
Sales and food tax rate	It changes. There are separate rates for inside the city, the police jurisdiction and the unincorporated county
Water and sewer rates	They change. The city department publishes two separate rate schedules , one for inside the city and one for the police jurisdiction
The three-digit city line	It changes. The city's own wording describes the line as being for inside the city limits
School district	It changes. The city's own district and the county's district are separate institutions
Unrelated occupants in a dwelling	It changes , and it changes with the zoning district as well
Yearly value tax on a vehicle	It can change , because one multiplier is your tax district
Law enforcement and towing	It changes. Inside the city it is the city force, outside it the county sheriff's office
County	It does not change. The whole city sits in one county
License and vehicle registration counters	They do not change. One county, one set of counters; but foreign national transactions are handled only at the state law enforcement office
Property tax and the homestead application	It does not change. The application goes to the county
Vital records and the marriage certificate	It does not change. The registry is statewide and the form can be recorded in any county you choose
Weather alerts and emergency management	They do not change. One county, one agency
Library card	It does not change , anyone living in the county can get one

Here is how to read that table: living in a single-county city does not mean the answer is always single. What draws the distinction here is not the county but **the city's own boundary and the authority band around it**. In the revenue department's own file, this city's share in the **police jurisdiction is half the inside-the-city share**; so an address that says **I am not inside the city** may still be paying tax to the city. **The statutory basis for that authority and the extent of the band could not be read in this research**, so we do not write how far the band reaches.

The first thirty days

TASK	WHERE OR HOW
☐ Run the address lookup and write the answer down	Am I inside the city limits, in the police jurisdiction, or in the unincorporated part of the county. Your neighbor's answer may not be your answer

TASK	WHERE OR HOW
☐ File the federal change of address within 10 days	uscis.gov/addresschange ; enter the receipt number of every pending application. If you have a case in immigration court, also file within 5 days on Form EOIR-33/IC
☐ Remember that moving at the start of a term is still moving	Dorm to apartment, apartment to a shared house, another address for the summer. Each one creates its own filing obligation, and the address you give the school is not an AR-11
☐ Open the water, sewer and garbage account	All three sit on one account with the city's own department. A \$25 activation fee , plus a deposit of \$80 to \$120 depending on meter size . Read the box below
☐ Open the power account in your own name too	School enrollment asks for two current utility bills in the parent's name , and in this city the water account produces only one bill; the second one is your power bill
☐ Check your bill and learn what kind of provider you have	If it is a regulated investor-owned company you have a state-level complaint route; if it is a municipal utility or a cooperative you do not . In this city the type of the electricity and gas provider could not be verified
☐ Get a library card	Free for anyone living in the county; a local higher-education identification is enough on its own and no proof of address is asked. For people staying temporarily there is a courtesy card with a signed letter from the place you are staying . No Social Security number appears in the published requirements
☐ Book the license appointment at the state law enforcement office	None of the county counters handle foreign national transactions; most state offices do, but not all
☐ Register your vehicle within thirty days	The yearly value tax is collected before the plate is issued and runs even when the vehicle is not driven
☐ If you have children, settle the school district	The city's district and the county's district are separate; ask for the document list in writing
☐ Sign up for the county alert service	The county emergency management agency runs its own alert registration and it is free. Its broadcast languages were not verified
☐ Leave the automatic emergency alerts on your phone turned on	No registration needed , they reach compatible phones automatically, and in a tornado this is the primary channel
☐ Choose your sheltering place before a storm comes	An interior room with no windows on the lowest floor. If you are renting, ask about the building's designated sheltering area before you sign
☐ Ask your employer whether anything local is withheld from your pay	No occupational tax was found for this city, but that does not mean there is none. The test is not residence but where the work is performed
☐ If you bought a home, put the homestead calendar on your calendar	October 1, October 1 through December 31 and December 31 . The application goes to the county revenue office

THE WATER ACCOUNT: A PUBLISHED ROUTE WITHOUT A NUMBER, AND THE GAP BESIDE IT

We put these two in the same box, because one is an opening and one is a gap, and writing only one would mislead you.

- **The opening.** The number field on the application is written as **the customer's Social Security number or taxpayer identification number**. And the form's own instruction says this: **if you would prefer not to provide a Social Security number on the form, you can request contact by a service representative instead, and you indicate that by writing a request to be contacted in that blank.**
- **The gap.** The same form's **required documentation** list names two items: **a legible copy of the customer's driver's license**, and **a copy of the lease or home ownership papers showing the date of occupancy at the service address**. **No sentence saying a passport is accepted in place of the license was found in the department's own text. We do not say it will be refused, we say we found no published sentence.**
- **The right move:** before you fill in the form, call **205-248-5500** and ask one question: **I have no driver's license, do you accept a copy of my passport**. Write the answer down with the date, and ask for it in writing if you can.
- **If your name is not on the lease** the form has a built-in route: you state **your relationship to the person named on the documents and that person's name**, and that person signs the form as a witness.
- **And the item that costs the most time:** on a disconnected account, **paying the balance does not automatically reschedule reconnection**. You have to request reconnection yourself, and **every tap in the home must be turned off** when the technician arrives, or you have to book again.
- **Garbage sits on the same account**, and the city's own guidance says **an active water account must be established before garbage service can be activated. We publish no water, sewer or garbage rate;** the schedules were not read in this research.

Where complaints go: who is regulated and who is not

The state regulator lists on its own consumer page, by name, **what it does not regulate:** electric cooperatives, **most water companies**, municipal utilities, wireless services, cable television and a regional federal power producer. It closes the sentence this way: **the agency therefore has no authority to resolve complaints concerning them.**

SERVICE	STATE COMPLAINT ROUTE
Water, sewer and garbage	None. All three come from the city's own department , which puts them outside the regulator's reach. The counterparty is the city itself and, if necessary, the elected city council
Electricity and natural gas	It depends on the type of your provider , and in this city the provider's type could not be verified . Check your bill: if it is a regulated investor-owned company there is a state-level route, if it is a municipal utility or a cooperative there is not

THE DISCONNECTION RULE: COLD ONLY, AND IT HAS FOUR LIMITS

- The regulator's rule says this: residential **electric or natural gas** service may not be **disconnected** for nonpayment where the temperature at that address is forecast to be **32 degrees Fahrenheit or below** for that calendar day. The controlling forecast is the National Weather Service forecast for that location.
- **The scope is electricity and natural gas only. Water, sewer and garbage sit outside this rule**, and in this city those three are on a **single municipal account**.
- **No heat trigger was found. So we cannot point to a state protection against an air conditioning disconnection in summer.** We do not say there is none, we say we did not find one.
- **The source's own effective date is very old.** Whether the rule was later amended could not be verified; we give the rule by name but **we do not claim it is in force today exactly as written**.
- **It binds regulated utilities only.** If your provider is a cooperative or a municipal utility, **the rule may not operate at that address**.
- **And a right you can use:** every utility must give **at least one employee in each of its offices the authority to extend the payment period and to arrange installments**. If you run into difficulty paying, **call before a disconnection notice arrives**.

Severe weather: two seasons, and a shelter map

- **There are two separate seasons and a newcomer does not know the second one.** The regional weather office's own text describes the main season as **spring** (March through May) and the second as running **from early November to the middle of December**. A student who moves in September or October can walk into November unprepared.
- **The moment to go to a shelter is the watch, not the warning.** A Tornado Watch is when conditions are favorable and **that is the moment to go to a community shelter**; during a Tornado Warning the agency's own wording is that **setting out at that point is dangerous**.
- **Good news specific to this city:** the county emergency management agency publishes a **storm shelters** page, and the map separates the records into shelters in the city, shelters in the county, pet-friendly shelters, open shelters and closed shelters. **But the individual shelter locations load through a component that runs in the browser and could not be read in this research; so we give you no building name.** Open the map at [the agency's own page yourself, before a storm comes](#).
- **The agencies' own rule:** community shelters generally open during a **watch**, each shelter has its own opening and closing criteria, and **they may not always be open**.
- **For a manufactured or mobile home the official advice is not to shelter inside but to leave in advance.** The weather service's own sentence: **leave well before the weather arrives and go to a sturdy building**. This is a rental decision. **We publish no risk ratio**, because no numerical ratio could be verified from any agency's own page.
- **Why knowing your county matters:** warning texts go out by county name, shelter lists are published by county, and emergency management changes by county. In this city the settlement sits in one county and the county carries the same name as the city, so the name you see in a warning will not be unfamiliar.
- **Language:** the regional weather office also publishes **a severe weather section in Spanish; no Turkish warning material was found at any agency**. The practical answer is the English and Spanish product set

plus a **weather radio**.

Housing and renting: five questions before you sign

- 1 **Is this address inside the city limits?** Look it up yourself; do not rely on the landlord's answer.
- 2 **How many unrelated people may live in this unit, and is it certified for five?** Read the box below.
- 3 **Which identification do they accept to open the water account?** If you cannot open the account, your move-in date slips.
- 4 **Does this building have a designated sheltering area, and where is it?** Whether a landlord in Alabama has any duty to provide or point out such an area **could not be verified**, so you have to ask the question yourself.
- 5 **Whose name will the utilities be in?** If you have children this is a school matter: enrollment asks for **two current utility bills in the parent's name**.

HOW MANY UNRELATED PEOPLE MAY LIVE IN ONE HOUSE

The city's zoning text sets the occupancy restriction this way, and **we write the codes out exactly, because the code is precisely what you will be searching for**:

- **The rule: no more than three unrelated persons** may live together in a single dwelling unit.
 - **First exception:** in the districts the zoning text calls **Historic Overlay**, a separate occupancy restriction in the city code applies.
 - **Second exception:** in the dwelling types the zoning text names for student use, that is **U-single, U-rowhouse, U-duplex and U-triplex**, and in **multifamily student-use housing**, the number rises to **five, but only where the unit is certified for that occupancy**.
 - Districts appear under these abbreviations on the city's zoning map and in its ordinance; **if you search by a description instead, you will not find your own district**.
 - **What it means in practice:** four graduate students sharing a house is not automatically lawful. **Ask before you sign:** how many occupants is this unit certified for, and may I see the certification. **Go by the document, not a spoken answer.**
 - **A source limit:** we read this text in the city's own zoning rewrite document and **the adopted code text could not be reached**, so **we give no section number** and we ask you to **have the figure confirmed by the city's zoning office**.
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- **Protected classes:** the state's fair housing provision lists race, color, religion, sex, familial status and **national origin**. **Source of income and immigration status are not on the list**, and **disability is not listed in this provision** (disability protection in housing comes from **the federal housing act**; the two are separate bodies of law). For a Turkish reader the provision to rely on is **national origin**.
 - **There is a retaliation ban but it is narrow:** it operates in three situations only. A complaint **to a public agency** about a building or housing code violation that materially affects health and safety, a complaint **to the landlord** about a violation of a particular provision of the act, and **membership in a tenants' union** or the formation of such an organization. **Those three are written out and not generalized into tenants are protected**.

- **The deposit cap is one month's rent**, with three exceptions. **Sixty days for the return or an itemized written accounting**; a landlord who misses the deadline owes **double the deposit, but to claim that you must have left a written forwarding address when you moved out**.
 - **And one ground cannot be cured**: a knowing material misrepresentation in the lease or in **the rental application. Do not sign a form you do not understand**.
 - **The 2011 act's ban on renting to immigrants was permanently enjoined but the text is still printed in the code**, and a reader who searches will find it. The citation is in the school enrollment guide above; if you run into a problem over it, **consult an attorney**.
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Living without a car: the city has its own train station

- The city has **its own transit authority**; it runs **weekdays from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.**, a single ride is **\$1.00** and **transfers are free**. The authority's own practical warning: the last run on which you can transfer at the main terminal is **the 4 p.m. run**. The main terminal is **601 23rd Avenue**, telephone **205-343-2300**.
 - **The university route is on the authority's own route list** and is **free with a valid university identification**; but **no sentence from the authority was found on whether someone without that identification can board by paying the fare**. We write neither that it is open to the public nor that it is closed; **call the authority**.
 - **And the item that sets this city apart: it has its own passenger rail station**. According to the national passenger rail operator's own state fact sheet, Alabama has **one permanent route** and **three scheduled stops** in the state; this city is one of them. **One round trip a day**, which means **a train you miss cannot be made up the same day**.
 - **No scheduled passenger flights were found at the city's own airport in research**. For a scheduled flight the reader goes to the airport in the region's large city. **We publish no distance or drive-time figures**.
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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**. At the register the **general rate is 10 percent and food and groceries are 8 percent**; the state lowered its own food share **but both the city and the county apply their full general rate to food**, so the rate you see at the grocery store is not the state rate.
- **There is a two-to-one gap between an owner-occupier and a landlord in property tax**: an owner-occupied single-family home is assessed at **10 percent** of market value; vacant land or property **not exclusively occupied by its owner** is assessed at **20 percent**. **An apartment bought to rent to students does not fall in the owner-occupied class**. **The penalty for a false claim is heavy**: the administrative rule charges anyone who knowingly and willfully gives false information **double the tax due for up to ten years back, with 15 percent annual interest**.
- **The increase cap resets when a property changes hands**. In certain classes the annual increase is capped at **7 percent**, with a base year of **October 1, 2024** and the rule applying from **collections beginning October 1, 2025**; but the cap does not carry over. **Budget from the new assessment, not from the seller's last tax bill**.
- **The answer to the number question is at the county, not the state**. The administrative rule for the exemption was read end to end and **it mentions no identification number anywhere**; but the application is

taken by **the county**, and **this county's published document list could not be read**. **Call the county revenue office before September is out** and note the required documents by name. **Whether the filing deadline differs at county level was also not verified**.

- **The county millage rates could not be read, so this guide contains no tax amount and no estimate.**

The one-sentence summary of this list: in Tuscaloosa the county question is settled, but **three separate lines run in its place**, and all of them are read from a single address lookup.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN TUSCALOOSA

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