Rules of the Street

Joburg's informal trading by-laws, explained SBD style.

For bra Sipho, Mama Dineo and every hustle on the corner.



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BEFORE WE START

What this book is (and is not)



Bra Sipho, Mama Dineo and Sis Nomsa are made up. The law is not.

The City of Johannesburg has a law for trading in public places: the **Informal Trading By-laws, 2009** . It is written in legal English. This book is the same law in plain kasi words, so that every entrepreneur can know the rules without paying a lawyer to translate.

We kept the meaning and dropped the jargon. Where the by-law says the Council decides something "by resolution" or "as prescribed", the detail sits in Council decisions and street signs, not in this book.

This book is not legal advice. It is a faithful simplification. For a case, a fine or a dispute, speak to the City or a legal professional.

The names are made up. Bra Sipho, Mama Dineo and Sis Nomsa are example characters. Any real person with the same name is a coincidence.

Checked against the source, 24 October 2026: the 2009 by-laws are still the version the City publishes on joburg.org.za. Fine amounts in this book are the 2009 figures. The City can change penalties and processes, so confirm current details with the City before you act. Full sources are on the last page.

SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY
Walk your trading spot like an inspector: Where is the nearest sign? The nearest intersection? Is your paper in your pocket?

CHAPTER 1

The street is a workplace

The law's first job is not to chase you away.



The table, the trailer, the salon chair on the pavement - all workplaces.

The by-law opens with a big idea: informal trading is part of Joburg's economy. The City talks about a "developmental approach" - making space for traders, keeping the peace between informal and formal business, and helping informal businesses grow toward formal ones.

Our words: **the street is a workplace, and this book is the rulebook for sharing it.**

The by-law starts with the door open: any member of the community **may be permitted** to trade - as long as you follow this by-law, the Businesses Act and any other law that applies. Freedom first, rules second. But the rules are real, and the rest of this book is the rules.

CHAPTER 2

Is this law talking to you?

If money changes hands in a public place, yes.



Fixing cars, fixing hair, fixing phones - a service for payment counts.

The by-law's answer is wider than most people think:

- **Informal trading** means selling goods **or services** in a public road or public place. Selling tomatoes counts. So does fixing hair, fixing cars or repairing phones - a service for payment is "selling" in this law.
- **Even one job counts.** A single act of selling, offering or rendering a service in a public road or place is informal trading. No stall or signboard needed.
- **Public road / public place** means streets, pavements, squares, parks and open spaces the public can use.
- **Your "property"** is everything you trade with: table, stock, tools, gazebo - even your bakkie if you trade from it.
- **Authorised officials** enforce this law: city officials, metro police (JMPD traffic officers), SAPS members and peace officers.

So yes, bra Sipho with his spanners on the roadside: this law knows your name.

> **SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY**
> Say it out loud: "My hustle is a business the law can see." Now make sure it sees a business that follows the rules.

CHAPTER 3

Six ways to trade

One law covers all of them.



Table, kiosk, trailer, gazebo, market row, event stand - chapter and verse, one law.

- **Street trading** - goods or services for reward in a public road.
- **Stalls and kiosks** - the table, the stand, the small structure.
- **Trading in a public place** - squares, parks, open spaces.
- **Mobile trading** - from a caravan or a light vehicle.
- **Linear markets** - trading rows in pedestrianised streets.
- **Special events** - matches, festivals, gatherings. (Periodic markets: up to 5 days.)

Different setups, same rulebook. The chapters that follow apply to all six.

CHAPTER 4

The spot and the paper

The two things an inspector asks for first.

The Council sets aside designated areas and stands for trading, and can lease pieces of verge to the owner next door on condition they make room for traders. To get a stand you apply to the Council. If you are approved:

- You sign a **lease agreement** and get a **token** - proof the spot is yours to trade on.
- **Carry it every trading day.** An authorised official can ask, and not producing it without a reasonable explanation is an offence.
- Your genuine employees can get their own tokens if you ask in writing.
- Breaking the conditions of your lease is also an offence.



Mama Dineo keeps her card with her money - both open the shop.

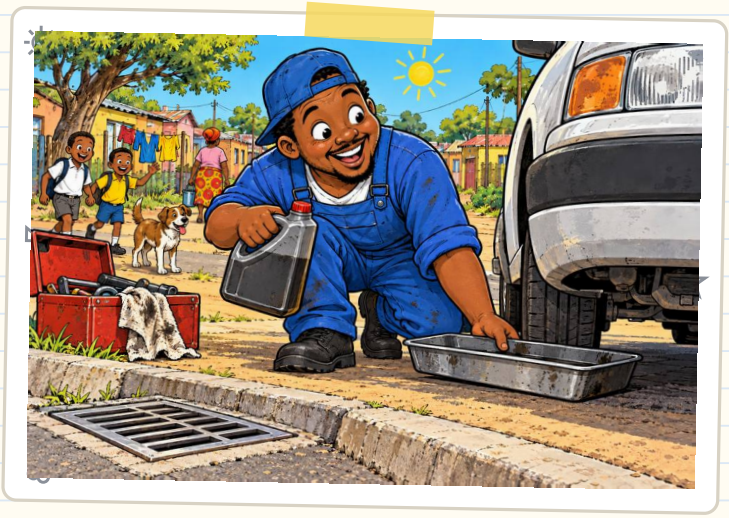
The smart card era (verified 24 Oct 2026): the City now uses smart trading permits and runs an online "Informal Trader Application" portal at informaltrader.joburg.org.za. In October 2025 the City also announced in-person registration at 66 Jorissen Place, Braamfontein, asking for ID and proof of residence. Announcements age - confirm the current process with the City before you go.

CHAPTER 5

Keep it clean

The health and safety rules, in one page.

- Keep your spot and your things **clean and well maintained** .
- **Litter** goes to a council bin or dump site - never into a manhole or storm drain. Your customers' litter from your goods is your litter too.
- When you close, the spot must be **free of litter** .
- No spilling **fat, oil or grease** onto the road or into a storm drain.
- No **smoke, fumes, smells or noise** from your work that pollutes.
- If an official asks you to move your things so the area can be cleaned or serviced - **move** .



Bra Sipho's rule number one: the oil goes in the tray, never in the drain.

For a mechanic this is the rule that bites first. Drip tray under every job, old oil leaves with you, spot clean at close. And a clean pitch is good advertising - customers trust a tidy workspace.

CHAPTER 6

Signs are the law

Read the street before you rent the spot in your heart.

The Council can declare any place restricted or prohibited for trading, and must mark it with signs or markings. Those signs carry the same force as a road sign. **A sign is enough notice** - "I didn't see it" does not help.

Before the Council declares an area, it must first consider the effect on the traders already working there.

Signs can also show where a stand begins and ends, and that a stand is taken. Signs can change - check your spot regularly, not only on day one.



Sis Nomsa checks the signs the way she checks the weather - before she sets up.

SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY
Take a photo of the nearest sign to your spot. If there is no sign, take a photo of the corner too. Know what the street says about your spot.

CHAPTER 7

The no-go list

Places the by-law says never - or never without permission.



Five metres from the intersection. Tape, not footsteps, bhuti.

- Any area the Council has declared **prohibited** .
- A **public garden** .
- Directly alongside a **police station** , a **place of worship** , a **public monument** , or an **ATM** .
- Where you block a **fire hydrant** or any **building entrance or exit** .
- Where you are likely to **obstruct vehicle traffic** .
- In front of a **home** if the owner or occupier objects and an official tells you.
- On a **council stand** without written proof that you hired it or were allocated it.
- Within **5 metres of an intersection** .
- On the pavement in front of a **shop selling similar goods** , without the owner's consent - once an official tells you there is no consent, that's it.

Trading on a leased stand against the conditions of that lease is also prohibited.

SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY
Measure your spot with a tape, not footsteps: is it 5 metres or more from the intersection? The by-law does not say exactly which point the City measures from - if your spot is anywhere near the line, ask the City how they measure it before you set up.

CHAPTER 8

The how-to list (part 1)

Where trading is allowed, this is how it must look.

- **No sleeping overnight** at your spot.
- **No shelter or structure** unless the Council approves it.
- Your setup may cover at most **6 square metres** (about 3m x 2m) unless the Council approves more.
- On a pavement: leave **1.5m walking space** from the building side and **0.5m from the kerb** . Pavement narrower than 3m - no trading at all.
- The **vehicle or trailer** you trade from may be there, but it must not block pedestrians or traffic, and must obey traffic laws.
- Don't **stack your things** in a way that can injure people or damage property.
- Don't **display goods** on or in someone's building without the owner's consent.
- **Move your property** when officials or service crews (electricity, telecoms, municipal work) need to work there.
- **Nothing attached** to buildings, pavements, trees, poles, parking meters, lamp poles, benches or any street furniture.
- No **nuisance** , no **damaging or defacing** the road or any property, no **traffic or health hazard** .

CHAPTER 8 (CONTINUED)

The how-to list (part 2)

The rest of the how, same chapter of the law.



The by-law names manholes, drains, toilets, bus shelters and trees. All no.

- **No open fire** on a public road or public place.
- Don't block the **view into a shop's display window** .
- Don't block **pedestrian crossings** , **parking or loading bays** , or any public facility.
- Don't hide **road signs** or the Council's own trading signs.
- Obey any **council notice or sign** about where you may be.
- Don't **dump, store or accumulate litter** anywhere but an approved bin.
- Everything you bring must be **easy to remove** - and must be removed when you close.
- **No storing stock** in manholes, storm drains, public toilets, bus shelters or **trees** . Yes, trees. It is written in the law.
- No trading against any **prohibition or restriction** the Council has approved.

CHAPTER 9

If they take your stuff

Impoundment - and the paper that gets it back.

If your property is found where trading is restricted or prohibited, an authorised official can **remove and impound** it - even if it is in someone else's hands at that moment.

But the law protects you too. They must give you a **receipt** that lists:

- what was taken, **item by item** ;
- **where it is kept** and for how long;
- the **conditions and costs** of getting it back (impoundment costs);
- that unclaimed goods can be **sold by public auction** ;
- the **name and address** of the municipal official you can make representations to, and the deadline.

Keep that receipt like money - it is the road back to your goods. And if your things are attached to a structure and you refuse a lawful order to remove them, that is an offence on its own.



The receipt is not just paper. It is the road back to your goods.

SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY
Decide now, before a bad day: if officials come, you will stay calm, ask for the receipt, and read it before they leave.

CHAPTER 10

Your workers, your problem

The law looks at the owner when the helper breaks the rule.

If your employee or agent breaks this by-law, the law treats it **as if you did it** - unless you can satisfy the court that you took **reasonable steps** to prevent it.

And the by-law says it plainly: just telling them "don't do that" is **not enough on its own** to prove you took reasonable steps.

So train your people. Show them this book. Write down what you taught them. Their mistake at your stand lands on **your name** .



Bra Sipho's apprentice now knows: drip tray first, always.

CHAPTER 11

What it costs

The offences and penalties chapter, translated.

It is an offence to:

- **break any rule** in this by-law;
- **ignore a notice** issued under it;
- **ignore a lawful instruction** given under it; or
- **obstruct or hinder** an authorised official doing their job.

The 2009 by-law sets a **fine of up to R500** - or up to **3 months in prison** if the fine goes unpaid. For each day the offence continues after the Council serves written notice to stop, the 2009 text adds a **fine of up to R10** or, if that fine goes unpaid, **up to one day in prison** .



Reading the rules first is cheaper than the fine.

Important: those amounts are the figures written in the 2009 text. The by-law allows the Council to prescribe and amend penalties. Before you quote them, confirm the current amounts with the City.

CHAPTER 12

The machinery

How the rules behind the rules get made.

- The Council can make **regulations** : new restricted or prohibited areas, demarcating stands, disposal of impounded goods, and penalties.
- Before a regulation is made, a **draft must be published for public comment** at least one month before. That is your chance to speak - use it.
- The City has an adopted **Informal Trading Policy** behind this by-law.
- Older councils' trading by-laws were **repealed** when this one took effect.
- Official name: **Informal Trading By-laws, 2009** .

When the City asks for comment on trading rules in your area, that notice is not paperwork for other people. It is the meeting where your street's future is decided.



That notice is the meeting where your street's future is decided. Go and speak.

SHO'T LEFT, DO THIS TODAY
Ask at your ward councillor's office or the City's offices how trading-rule drafts are announced in your area, and who to send comments to.

THE SBD TAKE

Three things the by-law asks

Strip the whole law down and it asks every trader for three things:

- **The right spot** - not prohibited, not blocking anything, within the lines on the pavement.
- **The paper in your pocket** - the lease, token or smart card, carried every day.
- **A clean pitch** - no litter, no spills, packed up when you close.

Know the rules, keep your paper close, and trade with pride. The street is a workplace - and it is yours too.

Sources (checked 24 October 2026):

1. City of Johannesburg, **Informal Trading By-laws, 2009** (the version published by the City): https://joburg.org.za/documents_/Documents/By-Laws/informal_trading_bylaws.pdf - the document this book simplifies. Fine amounts and processes are as written there.
2. City of Johannesburg, **Informal Trader Application portal** (live at time of checking): https://informaltrader.joburg.org.za/
3. City of Johannesburg media statement, 26 October 2025, "City of Johannesburg Empowers Informal Traders with Smart Trading Permits" (smart cards, registration at 66 Jorissen Place, Braamfontein): https://joburg.org.za/media_/Documents/2025-Media-Statements/City-of-Johannesburg-Empowers-Informal-Traders-with-Smart-Trading-Permits.pdf
4. City of Johannesburg MMC for Public Safety statement, 3 November 2025, on the court ruling on street vendors and by-laws: https://joburg.org.za/media_/Documents/2025-Media-Statements/PUBLIC-SAFETY-MMC-STATEMENT-ON-THE-COURT-RULING-ON-STREET-VENDORS-AND-BY-LAWS.pdf

This book is a simplification, not legal advice. Bra Sipho, Mama Dineo and Sis Nomsa are made-up example characters.

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